ALDERSLEIGH.

A Tale.

BY

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ALDERSLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

MALVERN.

ON a bright summer's morning in the year 1865 the whole population of Malvern seemed pouring forth to enjoy the fresh air of the Worcestershire Beacon. The narrow lanes and steep zig-zags leading up from the town to St. Ann's Well were crowded with pedestrians; mules and donkeys toiled along the shady ascent that winds round in the same direction; and all about the Well House gay and picturesque groups were basking in the sun, drinking the clear, cool water, to the healing virtues of which ancient superstition and modern science alike bear witness. Here the more weakly or infirm were content to rest, and

beguile long hours of leisure with the pleasant prospect before them, the life and movement around, or the strains of the German band, that appeared never to tire in its exertions for the public amusement. But the young, the active, and all who had the free use of their limbs, were eager to mount higher and reach the summit of the hill. Dainty little boots tripped over the greensward, scarlet and crimson draperies fluttered in the breeze, and fair, fresh faces beamed from under every variety of hat, glowing with health, exercise, and excitement. On they went, to the sound of light laughter and cheerful talk, playing with the long, slender poles, which they carried more for show than use on those mimic Alps. Merry children ran races up the grassy slopes, only checked by the voices of their eldesr, warning them to beware of the precipices. Even the visitors from the Black Country, the region of smoke and cinders, who had come by the excursion train for a single day's ramble amongst the hills, and whose mirth was ruder and more boisterous than that of their neighbours, added to

the animation, if not to the grace of the scene. It was altogether as pretty a sight as can be met with in the British Isles, and certainly not suggestive of that national gloom which foreigners are wont to ascribe to the hard-working people of England.

In the midst of this many-coloured throng a solitary stranger, clad in the sober grey suit and low-crowned felt hat of the traveller, was not likely to attract much attention. Yet more than one group stopped to look back at the lithe figure of a tall young man so attired, whose handsome and expressive countenance, just shaded by an indescribable air of melancholy, had arrested their notice in passing. It was a refined and delicate, but by no means effeminate face, with soft, dreamy, hazel eyes, a cheek evidently tanned by exposure to a warmer sun than ours, and that peculiar form of beard, mouth, and chin which we so often find in the portraits of Queen Elizabeth's day. It was such a face as, seen in an old picture, might have been set down as belonging to some friend of Sidney, or follower of Raleigh—

courtier, or soldier, or adventurer on the Spanish main—but, in any case, endowed with gentle sympathies and poetic instincts, and not unworthy of the age that produced a Shakspeare for all succeeding times.

The people on the Worcestershire Beacon did not indulge in these reflections. But they said: "What a fine young man! probably an officer in our Indian army." And some of the girls whispered: "Poor fellow! he looks as if he had been crossed in love."

Unconscious that he was the subject of remark, the young stranger proceeded on his way to the higher ground. Leaving on his right hand the North Hill, the Sugar Loaf, and the long, narrow valley that separates them from the loftier peak, he ascended the latter with the light, firm step of a man accustomed to bodily exertion. Ever as he went, the view over the vast expanse beneath seemed to grow wider and richer. One by one towns and villages, mansions and church towers, with all the varied luxuriance of park, meadow, and orchard, came out more distinctly at different

points of the landscape. From the pleasant villas of Malvern, nestling amid their gardens round the old Priory Church, the eye wandered to the Cathedral of Worcester and the more distant spires of Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, and Gloucester. But it was when he reached the summit of the ridge, that the full beauty of the prospect burst upon the sight of the traveller. Turning to the Herefordshire side of the Beacon, he beheld a magnificent range of woody eminences, green knolls, and barren heights, forming a strange contrast to the immense plain on which he had just been gazing, and extending in long, billowy lines from Shropshire to Monmouthshire, while far away on the horizon loomed the shadowy mountains of Wales.

He stood motionless for a few minutes, entranced by the magic of the scene. Then, wishing to survey it at leisure, he threw himself on the turf under cover of some thick gorse-bushes, and lighting a cigar—at once the stimulant and anodyne of modern thought—lay quietly smoking in the shade, absorbed in silent contemplation.

He was roused from his reverie by a kindly voice near him. "A perfect day for the view, sir," it said. "I have never seen it under more favourable circumstances. A bright sun, a blue sky, and yet clouds enough to soften and harmonize the landscape. I do not think it could be improved."

He looked up, and saw the portly figure of an elderly clergyman, with snow-white locks, ruddy cheeks, and a countenance radiant with intelligence and good-nature, leaning on a stout stick at a little distance from him.

"I am here for the first time, sir," he answered, with a courteous salutation; "but I agree with you in the opinion that the landscape could scarcely be improved by any change. To me it is very beautiful in itself, and doubly interesting from historical associations. You can perhaps assist me to the names of some of the places before us. What is that remarkable hill to the left, which looks like some huge citadel, surrounded by military outworks?"

"You have guessed the truth," said the clergy-

man, seating himself by the side of the traveller. "Yonder hill was a citadel of the Ancient Britons. It is the famous Herefordshire Beacon, of which you have no doubt heard—one of the oldest and most curious camps in the kingdom. Caractacus may have marshalled his forces under shelter of those ramparts and trenches. But, in fact, all periods of our history have left recollections in the neighbourhood of these hills. The Priory at Malvern dates from the time of the Conqueror; King John lies buried in Worcester Cathedral; Evesham reminds us of Simon De Montfort and his bold barons; and Tewkesbury, of the Wars of the Roses, and the murder of the young heir of Lancaster."

"And Hereford, of Humphrey de Bohun," added the stranger; "and Gloucester, of that Red Earl Gilbert who was lord of Malvern Chase. But in which direction lie Warwick, and Stratford, and Kenilworth?—and Edgehill, where King Charles fought his first battle with the Parliament?"

"There, at the further extremity of the great

plain behind us. I perceive that you are familiar with this country, from books, if not by sight."

"It has long been associated in my memory with some of my favourite studies; and to me it has a peculiar charm, because I come from a land where we have no very old recollections."

"But surely you are an Englishman!"

"My ancestors were English for many generations—I am an American."

"I certainly should not have known it. And yet I have generally recognised your countrymen, by something in the accent or manner."

"We are not all exactly alike," said the stranger, smiling. "There are still some differences amongst us, in spite of the republican tendency to one uniform standard."

"May I ask if you belong to the Northern or Southern States?"

An expression of deep sadness again settled on the features of the young traveller. "I am one of a conquered people," he answered, bitterly; "the soldier of a fallen government, and a ruined cause. I am a Virginian."

"Pardon my indiscretion," said the clergyman, with a look of real distress on his benevolent countenance. "I am truly grieved to have pained you, even for a moment."

"There is nothing to pardon, sir, unless it be my own weakness. But you will understand my feelings when I tell you, that I have private as well as public sorrows to deplore. My father and two brothers fell in battle. My mother died of a broken heart. I am the last of my race."

He sprang to his feet, and turned hastily away to hide his emotion. Then, recovering himself after a moment's pause, he again addressed his companion in a calmer tone.

"I have left America because of many things which I could not bear to see, and others which I did not dare to remember. I have come to England in search of brighter memories. One of my chief objects, in visiting this part of the country, was to discover, if possible, the old home of my family. It lay somewhere in the Valley of the Severn, within sight of the Malvern Hills. One of

my ancestors fled to it from Worcester field, and quitted it soon after, an exile like myself, to seek peace and safety on the other side of the Atlantic."

"I shall be happy," said the clergyman, "if I can help you in your inquiries. I am well acquainted with this neighbourhood, having lived in it some thirty years. Did the house you speak of bear any special name?"

"In the time of the Stuarts, it was known by the name of Aldersleigh."

"Aldersleigh!" cried the clergyman. "Then you must allow me to ask another question. Can your name be Vaughan?"

"Reginald Vaughan, at your service, late captain in the army of the Confederate States. Why do you ask?"

"Because by one of those strange coincidences, which seem so improbable in fiction, but sometimes happen in real life, you are talking with the parson of the parish in which Aldersleigh lies. Most people call these things accidents, but I am old-fashioned enough to ascribe them to other causes.

Be that as it may, I shall be glad to give you any information in my power."

"You are very kind. Is a Vaughan still in possession of the property?"

"Yes, an old gentleman, also the last of his line, who traces his descent from a Cavalier that fought in the Civil War—probably, a brother or cousin of your ancestor. You are related, I suppose, to the Welsh blood?"

"We always thought so, and, in days when such emblems were valued, we bore the Blue Lion Rampant on our shield. But *our* branch of the family was English from an early date. As for my ancestor, who emigrated to America, I know that, before leaving his native country, he made over the estate to a younger brother."

"Exactly so—that would explain the connection. But, if you like, I shall have much pleasure in showing you the way to Aldersleigh. I am just about returning to my vicarage, and, if you are not afraid of a long walk, we can go together."

"I am used to long marches," said the American, "and will gratefully accept your offer. A man of

my age would be ashamed not to keep pace with one of yours."

"Do not be too sure of that," returned the clergyman, with a merry twinkle in his eye, and a gallant flourish of his huge stick; "I have walked against men of all ages, weights, and sizes. But this, you know, is vanity, which is vexation of spirit, and hardly becoming in one of my profession. Let us make the round of the hill, and go down by the road through the Wyche—a passage cut in the rock from one side of the ridge to the other. If you are a botanist, there are some rare specimens of ferns to be found on these slopes. You will soon discover, also, that the prospect loses none of its loveliness as we proceed, and what you see before you is in perfect harmony with what is hidden from view. In the hollow yonder is Ledbury, a quaint, old, picturesque town; and there, just under the Herefordshire Beacon, lies Eastnor, the beautiful park of Lord Somers. In fact, the whole country for miles is rich in objects of interest."

"It certainly surpasses my expectation. We

have some glorious scenery in Virginia, but this has a character of its own, and then the poets have made it classic ground. I remember how—

> 'On a May morning
> On Malvern hills,
> Under a broad bank
> By a bourn's side,'

Piers Plowman saw his wonderful vision. And Drayton must have had these heights in his mind's eye when he wrote the seventh book of the 'Polyolbion.' "

"I am delighted that you are so well versed in our old poets, which is more than can be said for most Englishmen of this generation."

"They have been my friends from boyhood, and have helped to make me love and revere the old country. Moreover, they have given me an inexhaustible fund of enjoyment, of which no change of fortune can ever deprive me. Chaucer, and Spenser, and Shakspeare, are independent of place and time. Even poor Wither could say of his muse—

> 'In my former days of bliss
> Her divine skill taught me this,
> That from every thing I saw
> I could some invention draw,

And raise pleasure to her height
Through the meanest object's sight.
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustling;
By a daisy, whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed,
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man.'

I have always felt the truth of those lines, and in darker days than this, and less cheerful scenes, I have proved the value of such influences. They have often gladdened me in solitude, and consoled me under many trials. I do not know if you agree with me, but I think the old poets have far more *soothing* power than the moderns."

"With the single exception of Wordsworth, I am quite of your opinion. It is, I fancy, because they are more direct, more spontaneous, and therefore go straight to the heart. But I hope our acquaintance is not to end with this meeting, and that we may have opportunities of fully discussing these and many kindred matters. It is quite refreshing to fall in with any one who takes an

interest in such things, especially when he comes from a distant country, and I shall not be inclined to part with him so easily."

"The kindness you have shown me," said the American, "would be sufficient to make me share in your wish for the continuance of our intercourse. While I remain in this neighbourhood, I shall be truly glad whenever I happen to cross your path."

"Crossing my path is all very well, but I hope you will do me the favour to cross my threshold also—which reminds me that all this time I have never told you my name. It is Goodenough—Doctor Goodenough—Vicar of St. Mary's-in-the-Wold. There is not much to be seen in a poor parson's house, but I think you will be pleased with some curious black-letter volumes, which have long been the chief ornaments of my small library. Besides, I am only at a short distance from Aldersleigh, and you may have to wait till the Squire is in a good humour before visiting the home of your ancestors."

"Is he likely to feel annoyed at such a visit?"

"That depends very much on the gout, and the

weather, and his last night's rest. Poor man! he is greatly to be pitied. In broken health, alone and childless in his old age, and too proud to seek or accept sympathy, he is eating away his own heart. He has never recovered the loss of his wife and children. She (poor thing!) was consumptive, and they all inherited the fatal taint. He is on as good terms with me as with any one, although we do not agree upon some important subjects; yet I have to watch my opportunity before he will listen to any new proposal. But here we are at the Wyche!—so take a last look at the Herefordshire prospect, and then for a quick descent to the Worcestershire lowlands."

They paused a few moments at the entrance of the narrow gorge, and then passed through it to the Malvern side of the ridge. Engaged in pleasant conversation, the new friends—so different in age, appearance, profession, and country, yet irresistibly drawn together by a certain community of taste and feeling—began to descend the hill with rapid steps. The younger had now to acknowledge the walking powers of the elder, and could

not help admiring the sturdy vigour of the hale old man. Leaving the town behind them, they were soon threading the green lanes shaded with hedgerows that extend in all directions over that smiling plain. There they saw the black and white farmhouses in the midst of their sheltering orchards; the moss-grown barns and ivy-clad cottages; the village church peeping forth from its belt of trees; the mansion in the park, the meadows, the corn-fields, the hop-gardens—all the features, in fine, of the rural English landscape united in the golden light of a brilliant mid-day sun. Still, as they went, they looked back at the lessening hills, which varied continually in form with each successive winding of the road. And so, with agreeable sights, and a mixture of cheerful and serious talk, they sped swiftly along, scarcely heeding the number of miles they traversed; and the American expressed some surprise when, early in the afternoon, the clergyman pointed to a church-tower at no great distance, and informed his companion that they were close to St. Mary's-in-the-Wold.

CHAPTER II.

THE VICARAGE.

CROSSING a stile, the travellers took a foot-path over the meadows to the village. It was one of those quiet country places which are still to be found here and there in solitary nooks, apart from the noise and bustle of railways. The air was laden with the scent of flowers, and filled with the murmur of bees and the hum of insects. Cats and dogs lay sleeping in the sun on cottage door-sills, pigeons cooed and plumed their feathers on the eaves of outbuildings, the geese held undisturbed possession of the grass by the road-side, and small birds chirped and twittered securely in the quickset hedges of the trim little gardens. But no human figure was visible, except that of

a blind old man reposing in the shade, on a bench under the great beech-tree in front of the ale-house. The single shop on the green, which was also the post-office, appeared to be deserted by its tenants. The people were at work in the fields or busy in the interior of their dwellings, and only the sound of children's voices was heard at intervals from the neighbouring coppice.

"There is the 'Blue Lion,'" said the Vicar, "which was no doubt originally borrowed from the arms of your family. It is one of the vicissitudes of mortal things, that the symbols which once glittered in the tournament, or blazed in front of the battle, end by becoming the sign of a public-house."

"I suppose it will be the fate of all the lions in the world," answered the American, "and of all the eagles too, whether imperial or republican. We have our day, and then there is an end of the matter."

"Not altogether, I think," returned the Vicar, "for much depends upon how we use our day. Be it short or long, both men and nations will

have to render an account of what they did with it. For my part, I respect all symbols that once had a real, heroic meaning. It seems to me a poor philosophy that would treat them with ridicule or contempt."

"I am glad to hear you say so. It is too much the fashion, especially in America, to despise whatever is remote from the current order of ideas. Yet, as rational beings, looking before and after, we ought to take interest in the feelings of past generations."

"To be sure. If we wish to understand the present time, we must try to connect it with what has preceded, and what will follow. Wordsworth was right in that grand passage of his:

> 'Past and Future are the wings,
> On whose support, harmoniously conjoined,
> Moves the great Spirit of human knowledge.'

But, leaving such high themes, how do you like my Sweet Auburn? Is it not the loveliest village of the plain?"

"It reminds me of some places I have seen in New England. There is the same repose about it,

and the same air of comfort and neatness. Only, this gives one the impression of being older, and less subject to change than in our restless country."

"You will find that we are changing fast enough here. The movement of our population is making sad havoc with these rural solitudes. Then we have Insurance Offices waging war on thatched roofs, and Boards of Health recommending innovations, which even the parson feels bound to encourage. But now I will show you something that you cannot see in America—an early Norman church, not materially altered since the days of the Plantagenets."

Stopping to speak to the blind man under the tree, and to give him a small packet of snuff from one of the capacious clerical pockets, Dr. Goodenough led the way across the green to the churchyard. As he passed into the black shadow of some ancient yews, he came upon a tiny, flaxen-headed urchin, seated amongst the graves, and crying bitterly.

"Why, Billy! what is the matter now?" asked the Vicar.

The child rose at once, sprang confidently to the pastor's side, and looked up imploringly in his face. "Please, sir," he sobbed, "Dicky's been and took my ball."

"Taken your ball, has he? Rank felony without benefit of clergy! Where's Dicky?"

"Please, sir," said a second urchin, appearing suddenly from behind a tombstone, "he called me names."

"Called you names, did he? I can never turn my back for a moment without some of these dreadful things happening! What names did he call you?"

"Please, sir, he called me Daddy-long-legs!"

"Well, there was no great harm in that. I only know of one disreputable Daddy-long-legs, and that is the old gentleman who wouldn't say his prayers. Besides, you are stronger and bigger than Billy is, and ought to treat him like a father. Give him the ball, and kiss, and be friends; and, Billy, let me see you dry your eyes. If you are good boys, you may take this parcel of tea and sugar to your granny."

"Please, sir, granny's laid up with the rheumatics."

"Tell her to send round to the Vicarage, and Miss Mary will let her have some of the stuff to rub her poor limbs with. Now run away hand-in-hand, like Damon and Pythias!"

"Please, sir, we don't know 'em," cried both the children at once.

"I dare say not. They were good lads, who never called any one names, or took each other's toys," answered the Vicar; "some day I will tell you all about them. There," he continued, as the two boys ran off merrily together, "you see me in the discharge of my functions, Captain Vaughan. I am not only judge and legislator, but schoolmaster and dry-nurse for half the parish. And now, if you please, we will take a view of the church. The tower is bold and finely proportioned, and those solid buttresses have stood the test of ages; but I wish particularly to draw your attention to the doorway. There you have the true Norman arch, rising in this instance, not from single columns, but from bundles of slender

shafts. Look at those quaint ornaments like the teeth of a saw, and those two curious heads carved in the spandrels."

"I was just remarking the power and expression of the faces. The art of sculpture seems to have made singular progress at an early period."

"Yes; but it is quite possible that the heads are not as old as the arch itself. You may see that the windows belong to several different epochs, and it is the same with other portions of the edifice. We must leave the interior, however, till some future opportunity, as you will like to have plenty of leisure to examine your family monuments. At present, our most pressing want is something to eat, for the air of the hills, and a long walk, are excellent stimulants to the appetite. Let me show you the nearest path to the Vicarage."

He opened a wicket in the churchyard wall, and they entered a pleasant garden surrounded by evergreens. Beds of gay flowers bloomed on the slope of a small, but smoothly-shaven lawn, at the upper end of which stood a modest dwelling, built of the same grey stone as the church, and

adorned with a rustic porch, round which twined the honeysuckle and sweetbriar. As the Vicar approached, a spaniel and a terrier rushed out to meet him, announcing his advent with loud barks of delight, seizing him by the coat-tails, and covering his hands and feet with their boisterous caresses. He stooped to pat them affectionately, and proceeded with a buoyant step towards the porch.

"Where have you been, papa?" said a soft female voice. "Dinner has been waiting for you this hour;" and a young lady came forward to salute the Vicar, but drew back, slightly blushing, when she saw that he was not alone.

"This is my daughter, Captain Vaughan, who, being also my housekeeper, thinks herself entitled to rebuke her truant father. My dear, I have been to Malvern to get a mouthful of my favourite air, and to bring you some biscuits; and this gentleman has done me the honour to accompany me home. We are both very hungry, and had much rather find the dinner waiting for us, than have to wait for the dinner."

The young lady bowed smilingly in reply, and, as she retreated into the house, stole a hasty glance at the stranger, who stood uncovered in her presence. It seemed almost as if she recognised him, for she gave a little start of surprise. She was a fair girl of the genuine English type, with rich brown, wavy hair, a fresh, healthy complexion, and eyes of a clear, liquid blue—looking very modest and pretty in her lilac ribbons and pale muslin dress, but chiefly distinguishable from a thousand others of her age and sex by the peculiar sweetness of her smile, the delicate play of fancy in her changing features, and the expression of perfect candour on her bright, intelligent brow. It was altogether one of those faces which most men would like to remember, and to associate with images of maidenly purity and domestic peace.

Leaving the American to his ablutions in an upper chamber, Dr. Goodenough joined his daughter in the neat little parlour of the Vicarage.

"Why, papa," she said, with an arch look of reproach, as she threw her arms round his neck

and kissed him, "you have again brought home a visitor without letting me know, and there is nothing for dinner but hashed mutton and rhubarb-tart!"

"Well, my dear—and what then? A dinner fit for a king! Besides, we can have strawberries and cream; and the man who despises that delicious fare would have found fault with Eve's banquet in paradise. But you need not fear that my young soldier will be so fastidious."

"A soldier, is he? Do you know what made me start when I first saw him?"

"Not having perceived that you did so, I know nothing about it. Why were you astonished?"

"Because he is exactly like a picture I have seen at the Hall—a portrait of one of the old Vaughans, who fought against the Spanish Armada."

"That is remarkable enough. I have not noticed it myself, but I dare say you are right. It is well known that likenesses are often reproduced in families, even after the lapse of many generations. This gentleman is a Vaughan—one

of an American branch of the same stock—and no doubt descended from the Elizabethan hero in question."

"It might be his ghost," she answered, "come to watch over the fortunes of his house and name. But here he is on the stairs, and dinner is quite ready."

"I am glad you are not a ghost, Captain Vaughan," said the Vicar, "but flesh and blood like ourselves, and able to eat and drink like a Christian man. My daughter took you for the spectre of one of your ancestors, but, if you will accompany her to dinner, I hope she may soon be undeceived."

"I shall be happy to attend on Miss Good-enough, either in body or spirit," said the captain, courteously, as they passed into the adjoining apartment. "Am I really so like some older member of my family that I might have been taken for his ghost?"

"So like, that no one could miss the resemblance. I am speaking of an old picture of the sixteenth century. My father tells me you are

an American, Captain Vaughan, and it seems so strange to find a soldier of Queen Elizabeth revived in one of your countrymen."

"You have put us all down as Yankees, Miss Goodenough; yet my native State was founded by Queen Elizabeth's Cavaliers, long before a single Puritan had set foot in New England."

They paused a moment for the Vicar's simple grace. When they were all seated at table, the host resumed the conversation.

"I need not ask if the old military ardour survives in Virginia. We have had proofs enough of that. But are there many who still retain the habits and feelings of the Cavalier?"

"More than you would suppose. In spite of the changes produced by time, and the influence of climate and institutions, specimens of the antique chivalry may still be found amongst us. I have known some who lived and died like Sidney; and were I asked for a hero of the true knightly stamp, I should name one, under whom I have been proud to serve—the bravest soldier, the noblest gentleman—General Robert Lee."

The eyes of the young American flashed fire, and his cheek glowed with enthusiasm. The remembrance of his old commander stirred him like a summons to battle.

"But I should have thought," began Miss Goodenough—and then she stopped in some confusion.

"What should you have thought, Mary?" said her father. "Captain Vaughan will excuse our ignorance if we make any mistakes about his country."

"I fear I was going to say something very rude. What I thought—what I meant was—that, however brave, however noble the Virginians may be, there is one difference between them and English gentlemen—they have been brought up as slaveholders."

"Quite true, Miss Goodenough; but I hope you do not impute to us all the horrors that have been laid to our charge. I am no advocate for slavery, and would gladly have got rid of it by fair and honest means. But we inherited our property with this burden upon it, and were no more responsible for its existence than the negro

is for the colour of his skin. For the rest, I do not think we were much worse than our accusers. I can only say that, in my father's house, our slaves were more kindly treated, and more tenderly cared for, than most of the white servants I have seen."

"It redounds to the credit of your family," interposed the Vicar; "and I have no doubt there were many like you. But the general proposition remains, that irresponsible power must always be liable to abuse."

"I grant it," answered the American; "yet the relation between master and servant was often with us a very close one. It had in it something of the feudal, something of the patriarchal character. Not one of our negroes deserted us in the worst days of the war, and the pang I felt the most keenly in leaving my lost home, was the parting from attached followers whom I shall probably never see again."

"What will become of them?" asked Mary Goodenough, with a look of interest and sympathy.

"That is one of the great difficulties. The negro is yet a child, scarcely able to take care of himself, although, to judge by late books of African travel, he has made wonderful progress since he came into the white man's service. I did what I could for my people out of the remnant of my fortune, and, when I disposed of the land, I left some of them in tolerable comfort. I can only hope they may be as happy in their new freedom as they were in their old time of servitude."

"I would not have a slave for the world!" exclaimed Mary Goodenough. "However much I might wish to be just and kind, I should feel that the responsibility is too great for any human being. It must be dreadful to have power over the whole life of a fellow-creature!"

"That sometimes happens without slavery," said the Vicar, smiling: "our natural relations, and still more our human affections, weave chains as strong as ever kept slaves in bondage. But did I understand you rightly, Captain Vaughan, that you had taken a final leave of America?"

"I have certainly no intention of going back. It is a very great country, with immense resources and a magnificent destiny, as any of our newspapers will tell you, but not exactly the place for one who happens to be in a minority and to have tastes and opinions of his own. I shall probably travel for a time on the Continent of Europe, but my hope is ultimately to settle in England."

"How much of England have you seen?" asked Mary.

"Very little as yet. With the exception of the environs of London, my first visit has been to this neighbourhood. I am naturally desirous, Miss Goodenough, to see the home of my English ancestors. Of course I have formed some image of it in my mind, and I often wonder if the picture resembles the reality."

"I hope you will not be disappointed. To me it is a nice, dear old place; but you must not expect anything very large or grand. I consider it one of its chief merits, that it has not been much altered by modern improvements."

"There we should agree entirely. I should like it to be just in the same condition, as when the routed Cavaliers arrived faint and bleeding from Worcester field, to tell the inmates of the house that all was lost except honour. I should like to live over again those stirring times, and to feel the old loyalty to the King and the old hatred of the Roundheads."

"That sounds strangely enough," said the Vicar, with his pleasant smile, "from one who was born a republican, and who has been——"

"Who has been a rebel, you were going to say. Well, I suppose the vanquished must accept the word. Yet I think I could make out a case that our duty to our State resembled the old allegiance to the King, and that we had no alternative but to take up arms at her command."

"And depend upon it, my dear young friend, the soldiers of the Long Parliament made out a very good case for themselves. But we will talk no more politics at present, and I ought to apologize for having touched upon them. Happily there are subjects enough of interest common to

us all, without spoiling our dinner by any of these vexed questions."

So the conversation wandered into other channels, and the dinner went on gaily and agreeably to its close. It was a repast of the plainest kind, but seasoned with an amount of intellect and refinement not always to be found at more sumptuous tables. The strawberries and cream—choice produce of the garden and dairy—made their appearance in due course, and the Vicar brought out a bottle of his oldest wine, all covered with sawdust and cobwebs, in honour of the stranger guest. The young mistress of the house presided with grace and dignity at the simple board; and the American, as he watched her dainty ways, and those of the tidy maidservant in attendance, contrasted the scene, not unfavourably, with recollections of splendid banquets and long trains of sable domestics.

"I fear," he said, at last, "that, much as I enjoy your hospitable entertainment, I must think of my promised visit to Aldersleigh."

"That is true," cried the Vicar, starting up.

"We must try and catch the Squire before it gets too late in the afternoon. One more glass of wine, Captain Vaughan, and then I am at your service. We must leave the black-letter volumes for another occasion. They are worth seeing—real Caxtons and Wynkyn de Wordes; but they have lasted a good many years, and will be none the worse for keeping. I want your opinion, too, about several doubtful passages in the old poets."

"It will give me great pleasure to renew my acquaintance with them in your company, Dr. Goodenough. But I am really ashamed of taking you again from home after your long walk this morning."

"Never trouble yourself about that, my dear sir. I am good for a walking-match yet with many a younger man, although Mary there shakes her head and looks wise and matronly on the subject."

"I hope, at all events, Miss Goodenough, you will not blame me for the consequences."

"Oh, my father will have his own way, Captain

Vaughan. He is far too juvenile to listen to the croaking voice of eld."

"Then I may bid you farewell with a clear conscience?"

"Certainly. I wish you all possible success in your expedition."

"Whether I succeed or not, this day will always be a pleasant one in my remembrance."

Mary offered her hand in reply, and the American took it with an air at once friendly and respectful. Meanwhile the Vicar had snatched up his hat and stick; and, beckoning his companion to follow, he set out with giant strides in the direction of Aldersleigh.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD SQUIRE.

THEY entered the park by a ruined archway overgrown with ivy, and advanced up a broad avenue of tall and stately trees. It looked like the fitting approach to some lordly mansion, as the sunlight streamed through the foliage of elms and beeches and spread a chequered splendour on the path; but on either hand were signs of disorder and neglect hardly consistent with such a notion, for all about it seemed to be running wild, and to indicate poverty or indifference on the part of the owner of the soil.

"I have seldom seen a finer row of trees," said the American; "but the place altogether is different from what I expected. Were it not for

the cattle grazing in the long grass yonder, I should take it for a deserted property, such as, alas! may be found too often of late in my own country."

"Stop till you get near the house, where everything looks more civilized and habitable," answered the Vicar. "The fact is, that since he lost his family the Squire has paid but little attention to the estate. He is a strange, cold man in the opinion of most people, but his heart has been wrung more keenly than they will ever guess."

"You think he has a kind heart by nature?"

"Yes; and he has many other good points. He always treated me fairly, though at one time we were bitterly opposed in politics. When I first came to the parish, it was in the height of the Reform agitation of 1832, and I was on the Liberal side, while he was a staunch Tory. The battle was fought out manfully all over England, and we, as you know, had the best of it—but he was too much of a gentleman to bear malice."

"I should never have set you down as a Liberal, Dr. Goodenough."

"I was what used to be called a Liberal, when most of these modern Reformers were babes in the cradle. I was for Popular Education when it was thought atheism; and for Free Trade when it was considered little better than madness. But I was never for destroying the Constitution, or pandering to the mob, and I trust I never shall be."

"And you were always on friendly terms with the Squire?"

"Well, I can hardly say that. He held aloof for some years, and we kept on terms of civility rather than friendship. We had our differences on other matters besides politics. But time and events softened his feelings towards me. There was one, now no more," continued the Vicar, with a certain huskiness in his voice, "who was very dear to me, and who rendered many kind offices to his sick children. It was this which established a closer tie between us, and which makes him still look on my little Mary with affection."

Thus conversing, they reached the top of the avenue, and came upon an open space in front of

the house. If, as Miss Goodenough had said, it was not very large or grand, it was certainly very quaint, striking, and picturesque. Before it was an old moat, which had long been drained and turned into a flower-garden, and around it still flourished some of those quivering alders, from which the place had no doubt originally derived its name. A double flight of steps led up from the moat to a terrace, on which stood a sun-dial that had marked the hours for centuries. The Hall itself was in the Tudor style, with red brick walls and stone copings, oriel windows, peaked roofs and narrow gables, tall chimneys twisted into fantastic shapes, and little turrets surmounted by glittering vanes. On one side of the house was a long, low range of stables; on the other a walled garden of no very great extent. Behind it rose thick plantations of larch and fir, so that it seemed to rest under cover of protecting woods, and shone with a warm, ruddy brightness on the dark, sylvan background.

"Now I am satisfied," said the American. "This realizes the dream of my boyhood, and

carries me back to an age of chivalry and romance. I would not wish it other than it is."

"You can walk on the terrace, and examine the building at leisure," answered the Vicar, "while I go forward as pioneer. If you are to lay siege to the fortress, you must begin by surveying the outworks."

"To me it is an enchanted castle," said Vaughan, "which can only be entered by virtue of some magic spell. You are the beneficent sage, who alone knows how to conciliate the necromancer."

"Well, I will do my best, and return to you as soon as possible. You must not be disappointed if we fail in our first attempt."

After ringing twice at the front door of the Hall, Dr. Goodenough was admitted by an old, grey-headed servant.

"Well, William, how is the Squire to-day?"

"Awful bad, your reverence. He got no sleep last night, and has been going on anyhow. But you know master's ways as well as I do."

"Has he had another attack of gout?"

"No, your reverence, that's the worst of it.

He's always better after a regular good turn. But you see, sir, gout's a nasty, sly complaint, that hangs about a man without letting him know it's there, and worrits, and worrits him, long before it comes out in an open sort of way."

"I suppose he will see me?"

"Oh, yes, your reverence! He's in the library, and the mere sight of you will do him more good than a power of physic. Let me show you in."

"No, no, William, you must take in my name."

The servant complied somewhat unwillingly, and the Vicar heard the voice of the Squire in remonstrance against being disturbed. After the delay of a few minutes, however, he sent word that he should be glad to see Dr. Goodenough.

As the Vicar entered the library, and glanced at the well-known book-shelves of polished oak, the carved tables, high-backed chairs, and diamond-paned windows embowered in deep recesses—a tall, thin, stately old gentleman, with a bald head, and pale, sunken cheeks, rose laboriously from his seat, and advanced feebly, but courteously, to receive his guest.

"Now pray do not move, Squire, or you will make me feel I am intruding."

"I hope I may still be allowed to welcome you to my house, Doctor, although I am quite aware that I am scarcely fit company for any one but myself."

"Now, my dear sir, that is the exaggeration of an invalid. How do you find yourself to-day? Not worse than usual, I trust?"

"Certainly not better; but mine, you know, is the incurable malady of old age. I can only look for one last decisive remedy."

"We are both of us older than we were, Squire."

"Yes; but I am seventy-five. There must be at least ten years' difference between us in age, and twenty in constitution."

"I think, if you went out more, it would be of great service to your health. Such a day as this, for instance, puts new blood into the veins. I have walked to Malvern this morning, and am all the better for it."

"And I cannot walk to the end of the terrace

without resting! Besides, Doctor, you have something to live for. It is not the same with me."

"Well, Squire, we all have our task, and our appointed time. I know that I have been blessed with unusual strength and vigour, but I hope that less favoured people have some compensation in their lot. I have seen such contentment in poverty, and such resignation in sickness, as might well fill the mind with wonder and gratitude."

"Be it so," said the Squire, impatiently; "the experience of others affords me no consolation. But I will not trouble you with my infirmities. How is my young friend Mary?"

"Quite well and blooming, thank you. She will be glad to come over to the Hall, whenever you like to see her."

"Why should I inflict an old man's dulness on the young and happy? Let her enjoy herself while she can."

"That reminds me, however, of a request I have to make on behalf of another young person—one of the opposite sex—who is anxious to be introduced to you. Nay, before you answer, let me

explain who this gentleman is, and what claims he has on your notice."

And the Vicar proceeded to give a full account of his meeting with Reginald Vaughan, and to urge the propriety of receiving him as a kinsman.

"My dear Doctor," said the Squire, with some asperity, "I had hardly expected you would expose me to this intrusion. You might have felt sure that I could make no acquaintance with strangers."

"But I do not call one of your own family a stranger, however distant the relationship. He is a young man of whom you have no cause to be ashamed, and, if you will not see him yourself, you will at least admit him to view the abode of his ancestors?"

"Your good heart, Doctor, lays you easily open to imposture. How do I know that this may not be some impudent adventurer, who has assumed my name for purposes of his own?"

"I think, Mr. Vaughan, you might trust a little to my discretion."

"Pardon me, Doctor Goodenough; in such a

matter as this you must allow me to judge for myself. I cannot admit a stranger to my house till I know something more about him. I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot depart from my resolution."

"Then I will say no more on the subject. Perhaps you may think better of it on reflection."

"I am an old man, Doctor Goodenough, but not quite so weak as to change my mind from one moment to the other. However, I should be very foolish to quarrel with one of my few remaining friends. I hope you are not offended."

"Not at all, not at all," said the Vicar; "we have known each other too long for that. But you must excuse me if I leave you, as my young American is waiting for me on the terrace. I hope next time to find you in better health."

"Thanks for the wish, however ineffectual. If your daughter cares to hear of me, please remember me kindly to her."

They shook hands at parting, and the Vicar left the house with a slight cloud of vexation on his benevolent countenance.

"It is all in vain," he said, when he joined th American on the terrace; "the poor old Squire wi not listen to reason."

"I am then debarred from entering the home c my forefathers? Well, it cannot be helped, thoug I confess it is a great disappointment. I seeme to be so near the fulfilment of a cherishe dream."

"Do not be discouraged by this check. Depen upon it, the Squire will come round before long If you are stopping at Malvern, I will let yo know as soon as there is a chance; but, in th meanwhile, you must often come over to see me."

"I cannot sufficiently thank you for all you kindness. We met for the first time this morning and already I feel as if talking to an old frienc You will find that I am only too ready to trespas on your hospitality."

"My dear sir," said the Vicar, flourishing hi stick, "we are indebted to our common friend the poets, for bringing us together, and in tha noble brotherhood we may dispense with all idl ceremony. When will you repeat your visit?"

"Very soon, you may be sure; but I must now think of my return to Malvern. I have a long walk before me."

"The days are long, and you will be there by sunset. I do not press you to delay your departure, but there is no need to be in a hurry. At all events, our way lies together as far as the village."

"And you really think the Squire will relent?"

"I am certain of it. Only we must give him time. He is one of those people whom all the world could not drive from a resolution once taken, but his own good feelings generally triumph in the end. I sometimes compare him to one of those old trees yonder, stripped of its branches, and battered by the storms of many winters, till it looks a mere black, gnarled, misshapen trunk, and yet putting forth a green shoot occasionally, to show that there is still life at the core."

"I feel interested in this old man," said Reginald. "He is the fit representative of a race which seems destined to extinction in both hemispheres. Has he no heir to his name?"

"None that I know of. He was an only son, and I never heard of any collateral members of the family. Of course, there may be some in existence."

"And the old Hall, with its sheltering woods, will then, in all probability, pass away to strangers! It is a melancholy thought, and adds to the desolation of this wild, neglected avenue."

"So perish all earthly things!" said the Vicar. "It would indeed be melancholy, if we had no more abiding hope, and no safer resting-place."

He spoke simply and earnestly, and his young companion gazed at him with reverence as an expression of holy calm settled on the good man's face. But their conversation soon resumed its more lively tone, and by the time they reached the village the Vicar was in the midst of one of his cheerful stories.

They parted on the green, and each went his separate way. The Vicar returned to that modest home which was his haven of rest in this world,

and beyond which he had no ambitious aspirations. Yet forty years before, when Frank Goodenough was the pride and idol of his college, men had prophesied great things of the young student's future career, and had confidently anticipated his rise to eminence and distinction. But somehow he was wanting in the qualities which had led so many of his inferiors to fame and fortune. No glittering bait of rank or wealth had ever dazzled the eyes of the village priest, or tempted him to stray from the narrow sphere of duty in which he believed he could best render service to God and to his fellow-creatures. And the Master whom he served humbly and faithfully had rewarded him with the priceless gift of a contented mind, enjoying all simple pleasures with a childlike happiness, and bearing life's inevitable sorrows with a gentle and loving patience.

As Reginald Vaughan pursued his solitary walk, a thousand fancies chased each other in rapid succession through his brain. He thought of that ancient Manor-house, with all its venerable associations, and pictured to himself the figure of the

poor old Squire, sitting sad and lonely in the silence of the deserted rooms. Then he passed in a moment to the further side of the Atlantic, to another abandoned habitation, where he called up the image of his dead parents, and of the two young brothers laid in their untimely graves. And then, by a sudden transition, he came back to the sunny porch of the Vicarage, and the form of a fair young girl rose before him in her sweet, maidenly freshness, with the playful smile on her lips, and the innocent frankness in her eyes. And while a strange feeling awoke within him, and the conviction dawned upon his mind that the world has few better things to bestow than such a home, with such a face at the board, and beside the hearth—he sighed at the remembrance of his own homeless lot, an exile from the land of his birth, a stranger in the land of his forefathers.

Thus musing, he drew near his place of destination, just as the sun had sunk behind the Malvern Hills, and a brilliant sky, all dappled with rosy clouds, spread its magnificent canopy over the plain below, from which the more vivid lights were

gradually fading. But he still had a long ascent to reach the town, and before he arrived at his hotel the last golden streak had disappeared from the heavens, and the rose-colour had already melted into the dull evening grey.

CHAPTER IV.

A MERCHANT PRINCE.

AS Reginald entered the hotel, he overheard the following conversation between two of the waiters:

"I say, Harry, what wine has Mr. Higgins had to-day?"

"One bottle of Johannisberg, one of Lafitte, one of the dry old sherry, and one of the 'forty-seven port. He is a gentleman, *he* is."

"Well, I shouldn't like to have to pay his wine-bill, that's all."

"Bless you! what does it matter to him? He could eat and drink gold and silver, *he* could. We never had a nobleman in the house that lived half as well as he does."

"I wish it may do him good," said the other waiter, sententiously.

Reginald ordered a cup of coffee, and called for the newspaper. But he could not fix his attention, for his mind was occupied with the events of the morning. After sitting for some time with the paper before him, he rose and went to the window. The daylight was quite gone, but the full moon had risen and flooded the whole landscape with its mellow radiance. He strolled out into the garden, and again had recourse to a cigar.

While he was smoking, absorbed in thought, a second person came from the house and took a seat on the bench beside him. It was a fat, fair, florid man, between thirty and forty years of age, with red hair and whiskers, a white waistcoat of more than ordinary dimensions, and a somewhat ostentatious display of chains and trinkets. As he drew his hand from his pocket, and produced a velvet cigar-case embroidered with gold, a diamond ring of great value sparkled on his finger.

"A fine evening, sir," said the stranger, with that air of having made a new discovery which

so often accompanies some equally original remark.

"So fine," replied Reginald, "that I should think such weather not very common in this country. It feels to me like a warm night in Virginia."

"I call it confoundedly hot," returned the Englishman. "But I suppose, from what you say, that you have lived in the Southern States?"

"Yes; I was born there."

"Oh, indeed! Well, I always like to meet an American. North or South, it's all the same to me. You must know, I take a great interest in your country—and with good reason too, for I've made a pot of money by you. Ha! ha! there never was anything so fortunate as your civil war."

"For those who had the wit to profit by it," said Reginald, with a touch of irony in his tone.

"There you have just hit the mark, my dear sir. It's mother-wit that does it all—the *coup d'œil,* as the French say. As soon as the war began, I knew that you Southerners would fight

like tigers for your property—every man will fight for his property; so I bought cotton. But I knew also that you must be beaten at last, because, you see, I had some notion of arithmetic, and three to one are long odds all the world over; so I sold in time. It was one of the largest and most successful operations in the cotton market, and was much talked of, both here and in New York. I dare say you know the name of Higgins and Company?"

"I have not that honour."

"Well, I suppose you have not seen much of men of business. I am the head of the firm, and any one in Liverpool can tell you how we stand. But, talking of cotton, can you give any guess as to the probable amount of this year's crop?"

"I am utterly ignorant on the subject."

"Well, I don't want to pry into your secrets. Besides, I have no intention of touching the article again. But I think you had better throw away that cigar, and take one of mine—real *exhibition* specimens of the finest brand—cost me three shillings a piece, and no mistake."

"I am much obliged to you," said Reginald, somewhat haughtily, "but I prefer smoking my own."

"Well, it's your loss, not mine," returned Mr. Higgins, whose delightful frankness was never impaired by any superfluous delicacy. "They are not for everybody's money, and you may wait some time for such another offer. But smoking without drinking is dry work, after all. Here, waiter!" he shouted, at the top of his voice, in the tone of a mariner hailing a ship at sea; "bring me some brandy and soda-water!"

The waiter flew to execute the commands of the wealthy merchant, who had already acquired a reputation for boundless liberality; but he was not so well received as he expected on this occasion.

"Where's the ice, you blockhead?" said Mr. Higgins.

"Very sorry, sir; quite out of ice, sir. Very hot weather, and all has been used up."

"Now isn't that like this infernal, stupid old country? You always have ice in the States, I believe?"

"Yes," said Reginald; "when we can get it."

"Ha! there you see the effect of democratic institutions. Well, I have an ice-house at home, that keeps me supplied all the year round—cost me a mint of money; but I never care about expense—not when it contributes to one's own comfort, you know. I have every convenience and luxury at head-quarters, and I often think what a fool I was to come here. Don't you find this Malvern a horrid slow place?"

"I have not been here long, but I like what I have seen of it very much."

"Dull as ditch-water, I assure you. Nothing to do but walk up hill to get an appetite, and walk down again to get a dinner. I should never have come, only that Mrs. H—— fancied I was out of health. The fact is, we *do* feed rather too well at Liverpool, and I wanted rest and change, so I resolved to try the water-cure."

"Indeed! I should never have guessed it."

"Yes; but I wasn't going to follow their nonsense, you know. I tried it for one day, and that was enough. Why, those doctors would starve a

fellow alive, and turn all the blood in his veins to curds and whey. So I took my own course, which I always find the best in the long run. But the place is horribly slow for all that. If a man wants to leave home, let him go to Paris. *There* he can get something for his money."

"You have travelled much on the Continent?"

"Travelled? I should think so. Been everywhere, from Antwerp to Naples. Know all the best *table d'hôtes* in Europe. It's the only way, you see, to taste a variety of dishes, and become acquainted with the wines and cookery of the different countries. Then you meet lots of company, and a man of fortune is treated with proper respect. Those foreign counts and barons don't give themselves airs like our swells."

"I was not aware that English gentlemen gave themselves any special airs."

"Then you may take my word for it!" cried Mr. Higgins, with a sudden burst of indignation. "There are no more insolent puppies in the world than some of our high-bred nobs. The beggars! what are they, I should like to know, to set them-

selves up above *me?* They would be glad enough to have my name on the back of their bills, and yet they turn up their noses at men who could buy them out of half their estates. But never mind! it will be our chance by-and-by. There's a good time coming; and, when the people have their own, we shall teach these lazy whelps of the aristocracy to mend their manners."

"You seem to be a great democrat, Mr. Higgins?"

"Yes, sir; I'm all for popular rights, and that sort of thing. Reform's the cry, on which I mean to get into Parliament. I don't care how much money it costs, so I'm pretty sure to succeed. Why should a lord, because he just happens to have a handle to his name, have more influence than a British merchant? And why should the honest workman, the bone and sinew of the country, be trampled under foot by the worthless minions of a court?"

"I presume," said Reginald, smiling, "that the last sentence is intended to form part of one of your election speeches?"

"Well, sir, it would not sound badly on the hustings. I flatter myself I could make some of them shake in their shoes. They talk of their universities and classical education; but they are no match for the sharpness of a commercial man like me. In trade, we are obliged to have all our wits about us, and to keep wide-awake and up to the time of day; and so, you see, when we go in for politics we learn the whole business in no time. We have only to ask, why one man should be a lord or a baronet and another his humble servant? Why a few great families should have more land than all the rest of the country put together? And why those who earn the wealth of the nation should have less voice in the government than those who spend it?"

"Has it never struck you, Mr. Higgins, that the people you address might go on to ask some further awkward questions? Such as, for instance, why one man should drink champagne and another small-beer? Why one should wear broad-cloth and another fustian? Why one should ride in a carriage and another walk on foot? Why one

should be a poor labourer and another a rich merchant? And why rank should be more odious than wealth to those who are possessed of neither?"

"Oh, bother! that's quite different, you know. A merchant works for his money, and so has the best right to spend it as he pleases."

"And to buy land with it if he likes," said Reginald, "and to leave it to his children, who may not be merchants."

"Now, if there's one thing I hate more than another, it's going into particulars. Keep to general principles, that's my maxim. All men are born free and equal—we are all made of the same flesh and blood—those are the kind of sayings which nobody can deny. And then it stands to reason that an aristocrat must be a tyrant. He thinks himself above the people, and therefore he treats the people like dirt. No, sir! there will never be any peace in this country, till it is governed by sound, mercantile men, elected by universal suffrage."

Reginald did not think it worth while to continue the argument, if so it could be called. He

rose from his seat and began to walk up and down the garden. "Yes," he said to himself, as he paced to and fro in the moonlight; "we are all of the same flesh and blood; but how different is the import of those words, according to the practical application we give them. If they mean that every man has duties to all his fellow-men, whether rich or poor, gentle or simple, wise or foolish, they are divinely and eternally true. But if they are intended to imply that all have an equal right to legislate and govern, they are absurdly and ridiculously false. Human power is a trust, and the fitness of any man, or set of men, to exercise it, can only be tested by experience. No doubt, in dealing with classes, we have to make our selection roughly and in the mass, or such men as Mr. Higgins could never have any voice in the government of a state. But his folly is, at all events, balanced and controlled by the influence of people wiser and better than himself. What would it be were the choice of rulers chiefly in the hands of those to whom Mr. Higgins is the model of a patriot and statesman? But I need

not ask the question, for the history of my own country supplies the answer."

Meanwhile, Mr. Higgins sat sipping glass after glass of brandy and soda-water, till his cheeks became redder, his eyes more fish-like, and his hand more tremulous than usual. He was roused by the approach of a young man in the dress of a groom, who, touching his hat, seemed to await the orders of his master.

"Where the devil do you come from?" said Mr. Higgins.

"You know, sir, you gave me leave to go over and see my mother."

"And what the deuce made you so late in coming back? I might have wanted the horses this evening, and not an infernal scoundrel there to get them for me."

"I am very sorry, sir; but I found my poor mother dangerously ill. I waited to see the doctor, and so missed the train."

"Don't tell me any of your confounded lies, you rascal! You have been drinking, I know; you can't walk straight, nor stand straight, nor

look straight. And there's nothing I hate more than a liar and a sot. But you servants are all alike—a set of worthless vagabonds!"

"I tell you what, sir," said the man, as if stung beyond endurance; "I have not been drinking, and I never told you a lie; but I have my feelings as well as others, Mr. Higgins, and I won't bear this treatment any longer. So, if you please, sir, this day month you may provide yourself with another servant."

"Why, you confounded fool! do you think any one else will give you half the wages you get from me?"

"I don't know about that, sir; but I'm not a nigger, to sell myself into slavery. I'd rather take half wages, and serve a gentleman."

"You impudent hound!" roared Mr. Higgins, as he flung the contents of his glass into the servant's face; "do you dare to tell me that I'm not a gentleman?"

"I'll make you pay for that, however," said the man, coolly. "You are a witness to the assault, sir," he added, touching his hat to Reginald.

"You had better go away now," replied the latter, "and leave all explanations till to-morrow. Come, Mr. Higgins, you are a little excited. Allow me to give you my arm as far as the house."

"And who the devil are you, sir, and who wants your assistance? Not a gentleman, indeed! If I'm not a gentleman I should like to know who is! Best carriage, best horses, best wines, a fine house, plenty of money—what more do you require? Clothes all made by a tip-top tailor, this diamond a jewel of the first water, no expense spared for anything—if that doesn't show the gentleman, I should like to know what does! As for servants, all a set of ungrateful wretches! Never know when they are well off. Rob you as much as they please, and then give you no thanks. Not a gentl'm'n, indeed! Well, if that isn't the best joke I've heard this twelvemonth! Not a gentl'm'n! Ha! ha! I should never have thought it! Not a gentl'm'n! That's funny—very funny—remarkably funny——"

And, becoming somewhat inarticulate in his

speech, Mr. Higgins staggered back to the hotel, and was helped up to bed by the waiters.

"There goes the enlightened friend of the people," thought Reginald; "the man who is so anxious to deliver them from the yoke of the aristocracy, and who cannot even behave decently to his own servants. But surely this cannot be a fair specimen of the merchants of England—the successors of the Greshams and Middletons of former days. It can only be a monstrous exception."

The American was partly right, and partly wrong. No fair specimen, certainly, of the main body of English merchants, Mr. Higgins—or Tom Higgins, as he was generally called on the Exchange at Liverpool—might yet be considered the representative of a large and increasing class. Men raised suddenly to the possession of enormous wealth by that system of wholesale gambling which in modern times bears the name of commercial speculation—destitute of every personal claim to respect, low in taste, coarse in habits, ignorant, vulgar, and presumptuous—believe that they can

supply all other deficiencies by an ostentatious display of riches. The result is ridiculous enough, but also attended with mischief; for, as even such men have their admirers and imitators, the standard of morals and manners is gradually lowered by their example, and luxury and extravagance become substitutes for every higher and nobler title to distinction.

But Reginald soon withdrew his attention from the scene he had just witnessed, and went back to the earlier impressions of the day. As he prepared for rest he recalled the adventures of the morning, and when he lay down to sleep the image of Mary Goodenough mingled with his dreams.

CHAPTER V.

THE INTERVIEW.

ON the third morning after the events narrated in the preceding chapters, Dr. Goodenough was seated at breakfast, with his daughter pouring out the tea, and his two dogs at his feet begging for bread and butter, when a letter was brought to him from the Hall. He broke the well-known seal, with its large, old-fashioned coat of arms, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR DR. GOODENOUGH,

"Since I had the pleasure of seeing you the other day, I have been thinking over what passed between us. I was far from well at the time, and may have taken too hasty a resolution.

If the young gentleman you mentioned is really connected with my family, it would perhaps be ungracious to refuse him admission to the house, and, if he comes, I should not wish to treat him uncourteously. I shall, therefore, be ready to receive him any morning he likes to call, and I need not say I shall be all the better pleased if you are kind enough to accompany him.

"With best remembrances to Miss Mary,

"Believe me, my dear Doctor,

"Yours very faithfully,

"RICHARD VAUGHAN."

"I told you so," cried the Vicar, rubbing his hands triumphantly. "The Squire is like my Snap here—his bark is worse than his bite. But I wonder we have seen nothing of our young American. I must write to him, or go and look after him."

"It will be a nice excuse for a walk to Malvern, papa," said Mary. "Only let me know when you are going, and when I may expect you home to dinner."

"Well, my love, let me see. I have to visit poor old Goody Brown, and two or three other calls to make this morning. I am afraid I must put it off till to-morrow."

"I could look in on Goody on my way to the school," said Mary, "and sit with her in the afternoon, and read to her out of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' She is never tired of hearing about Giant Despair."

"God bless John Bunyan," cried the Vicar, "for all the comfort he has given to many a poor soul in trouble! He understood the people's language better than most of your learned divines, and his words have lifted the burden from many weary backs. But I promised Goody to come and see her this morning, and I would not break my word for pope or pagan."

"Or even for a Christian Captain, papa, though I know you are all impatience to take him to Aldersleigh. I am very glad the Squire has proved so amiable."

"Why, you ought to know him, Mary. He has always been very fond of you."

"And I have always liked him, since the days when I used to sit playing with my doll in the corner, and watch him walking up and down the long gallery, looking so grave and sad. But he would never let me be to him what I wished. Of course, dear papa, I could not and would not be any one's daughter but yours; yet I have often thought that, in some things, if the poor Squire would have allowed me, I might have done just a little to make him feel his children's loss less bitterly."

"Yes, my darling; I know you would have done so if you could. Can I ever forget what you have been to me? But we will not darken this bright morning with melancholy thoughts. All nature is alive, and stirring with a sense of joy, and surely we have as much cause to be happy and thankful as birds and beasts. Come, Snap! Come, Rover! we must be off to the village."

"And you will be back in good time for dinner, papa?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Housekeeper; the pudding shall not be kept waiting. Now give me a kiss,

and let me go. The Parson in the 'Canterbury Tales' had no daughter to hold him back from his duties, or he would never have earned the praise of Chaucer for his diligence."

"Oh, depend upon it, so good a man must have had somebody to pet and plague him! I dare say his brother, the Ploughman, had children."

"Very likely. When are you going to the school?"

"As soon as I have looked after some household matters. We shall probably meet in the village."

The Vicar kissed his daughter, and went off with his two dogs at his heels. But scarcely had he reached the churchyard, when he saw a tall figure approaching by the path under the yew-trees, and recognized with some astonishment the form and features of Reginald Vaughan.

"Surely," said Dr. Goodenough, after the first greetings, "you have not come all the way from Malvern so early in the day?"

"No," answered Reginald; "I arrived here last night, and have taken up my quarters at the

'Blue Lion,' where I am very comfortable. I felt an irresistible longing to see more of the old place, and thought I should have a better chance by being nearer to the spot."

"Well, I have good news for you," said the Vicar, producing the Squire's letter; "I told you how it would be, and now we shall have it all our own way. We will go over to Aldersleigh this very morning. But first I must get through my pastoral work. If you will go into the church, and examine the monuments, I will come and fetch you as soon as I can. I have the key in my pocket."

As Reginald gladly assented to this arrangement, he was soon left alone in the old building, busily engaged in scrutinizing every tomb and inscription in nave or chancel. There were the monuments of the Vaughan family for many generations—some mere slabs or tablets, others adorned with armorial bearings, or surmounted by sculptured figures, kneeling or reposing in death. There was the Vaughan who marched with Stanley to Bosworth field—the Vaughan who served with

Drake against the Armada—the Vaughan who fought in the Civil War, and helped to bring about the Restoration. Then came a series of Vaughans, who had led the lives of private gentlemen, being opposed to the Revolution, and estranged from the court of the Hanoverian sovereigns. And there was the tomb of Emily, wife of Richard Vaughan, the present Squire, with inscriptions to the memory of all their children: Richard, and Emily, and George, and Ellen, and Arthur, and Margaret; while the dates of the deaths, and the places—Madeira, Devonshire, and the South of France—told the sad tale of a hopeless struggle against a pitiless disease. And then Reginald paused before a modest tablet, which bore the following epitaph:

Sacred to the Memory of

MARY,

THE BELOVED WIFE OF

THE REV. FRANK GOODENOUGH, D.D.,

VICAR OF THIS PARISH.

SHE DIED ON THE 10TH OF MAY, 1860, IN THE 45TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

"THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH, NEITHER SORROW, NOR CRYING, NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN; FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY."

Reginald had often read those solemn words before, but they seemed to come home to him in all the fulness of their meaning as he stood amid the memorials of vanished glories and the wrecks of so many human hopes. He thought of the ancient race of which he and the old Squire were now probably the only living representatives, and of the six fair children who might have transmitted the name to posterity, brought one by one from afar to rest in the dark vault below. He thought of Mary's mother, taken away in the prime of her mature womanhood, and the image of his own dear mother smiled faintly at him as from a great distance, and he heard, as it were in a whisper, the voices of his lost father and brothers. And then the words of the everlasting promise stood out full and clear before him, bidding him be of good cheer, for all these were safe in the hands of God; and he knelt silently at the altar, and humbled himself in submission to the Eternal Will; and a ray of the Divine Peace fell upon him, and he arose strengthened and comforted.

When the Vicar returned to the church, he found Reginald with his pocket-book in his hand, copying some of the inscriptions. They spoke little while they remained in the sacred building, for both seemed occupied with serious reflections; but when they issued forth into the open air, the buoyant spirits of the clergyman were the first to revive, and, whistling his dogs to follow, he was soon talking and laughing merrily on the way to Aldersleigh.

This time they were admitted without difficulty, and shown at once into the library. The Squire was prepared to give a courteous reception to the stranger, but he had expected a visitor of ordinary, perhaps plebeian appearance, and was evidently surprised at the look and bearing of Reginald. Himself a gentleman of the old school, he was sensitively alive to little points of breeding, and perceived in a moment those delicate shades of manner which in every country mark the man of refinement and education. Pleased at the first address of the young American, his welcome was not only polite, but almost cordial.

"I am greatly indebted to my friend, Dr. Goodenough," he said, "for bringing you to the old house. It must, of course, have some interest to any one bearing the name of Vaughan, and, although I am not now in the habit of receiving guests, I shall have much pleasure in showing it to you."

"I can only thank you most sincerely," answered Reginald, "for the exception you have made in my favour. It would, I confess, have been a great disappointment to me, had I been unable to visit a place which is associated with my earliest recollections."

"I was not aware," said the Squire, with a feeble smile, "that such old-world traditions were still preserved in America. I should have thought that the story of your republic had effaced all previous memories."

"I assure you, sir, that I was nurtured on tales of the Great Rebellion, and that Rupert and Montrose were as familiar to my childhood as Washington himself. There is a strange tenacity in the English character which clings

to old things under very altered circumstances."

"I should once have believed so," replied the Squire; "but I have seen such an overturn in my time of all established usages and opinions, that I think the national character itself must be wonderfully changed."

"Not so much as you suppose, Squire," said the Vicar. "We are still the same pig-headed race that sat singing over our cups the night before the battle of Hastings, because we fancied the Normans were no match for us jolly Saxons, and died fighting round our king next day like so many stubborn bull-dogs."

"If you mean to paint loyalty and valour by that description, Doctor, I hope there is a little of both left in the land; though, if years and failing health do not deceive me, those virtues are less honoured than formerly. But you and I, Captain Vaughan, can hardly in any sense be called Saxons; our blood comes to us from another source."

"I have always been told," said Reginald, "that

its current has flowed down to us from the ancient princes and chiefs of Wales."

"Mixed with the great English stream, however, and many tributaries," interposed the Vicar, laughing. "Those remote genealogies are very hard to follow; and if I were you, I should prefer being descended from a line of civilized gentlemen to any distant connection with a horde of warlike savages."

"Such may be your opinion, Dr. Goodenough," said the Squire, with a sudden flush on his pale cheek; "but allow me to tell you that the princes and chiefs of Wales were not savages, and that many of them are celebrated as heroes by the bards of old."

"I beg your pardon, Squire, but I really intended no affront to your Cambrian ancestors. I should be the last man to dispute the authority of the bards.

'Cold is Cadwallo's tongue
That hushed the stormy main;
Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed:
Mountains, ye mourn in vain
Modred, whose magic song
Made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-topt head!'

Believe me, I have the highest respect for them all, from Taliessin downwards."

"I dare say you are laughing at us, Doctor, but I suppose we must take it quietly. The old fire is burning low, and I have neither the strength nor the energy to argue with you. The Doctor was always a bitter Whig, Captain Vaughan, and you, as a Republican, would probably sympathize with him."

"I am not sufficiently informed, sir, as to the state of parties in this country to determine what I should be called in your political vocabulary. But, in reading the history of England, my feelings have always leaned to the defenders of the altar and the throne."

"Meaning the Whigs, of course," said the Vicar. "They saved both altar and throne from running to ruin long ago."

"They saved their own fortunes and family influence, Dr. Goodenough; but I have yet to learn what services they rendered to the Crown; and as for the Church——"

"Well, my dear Squire, you shall have it your

own way for once. In sober seriousness, I believe both Whigs and Tories have helped to make the greatness of England. And, between ourselves, both have had their little peccadilloes; but we need not expose them, you know, to the criticism of our American cousins. As for our young friend here, he belongs altogether to a previous century; and when you exhibit your relics of the Civil War, you will soon see whether he is a Cavalier or a Roundhead."

"That reminds me it is time to look over the house," said the Squire; "and with your permission, Captain Vaughan, I will show you the way. You must excuse me if I move but slowly."

The old man rose with difficulty from his chair —with such difficulty, indeed, that Reginald ventured to offer his arm. In general, the Squire would have resented this interference as an unauthorized liberty; but he had taken a fancy for the young soldier, and accepted his proffered assistance without hesitation. They visited the dining-room, with its dark wainscotted walls, its huge fireplace surmounted by a carved oaken canopy, and its

quaint ornaments of antlers and trophies of the chase; the drawing-rooms, with their old-fashioned hangings, and deep, oriel windows; the large, comfortable kitchen, with its ample chimney-corners, which now wore a somewhat cold and deserted look, as though but little used of late for festive purposes; and a small, octagon apartment, lighted with coloured glass, which had evidently served as an oratory or private chapel. Then they ascended a wide staircase, with balusters of solid oak, and arrived at a long gallery reaching from one end of the house to the other, and communicating with the different sleeping-chambers. In this gallery were preserved the principal treasures of the place. The walls were hung with family pictures, and adorned with weapons and old armour, while in sundry antique chests and cabinets were laid up many curious relics of past generations. These things at once commanded Reginald's attention, and drew from him various remarks, which proved both his knowledge of English history, and the interest he took in the subject.

When they came to examine the pictures, they paused by common consent before the full-length portrait of a young man, clad in a complete suit of armour, and leaning upon his sword, but bare-headed, with his helmet beside him, and a tall ship in the background displaying the red cross of St. George. This was the champion, who fought against the Armada, and both the Squire and the Vicar recognised at the same moment the striking likeness to Reginald. It seemed to dissipate the last shade of reserve on the part of the former, and he turned towards the young American with a warmth of manner which had long been foreign to all his ordinary habits.

"*There* is a witness," he said, "whose testimony is decisive as to your being a Vaughan. I congratulate you, my dear sir, on your resemblance to one of the bravest and best of the race."

"What is known of this gentleman's history?" asked Reginald.

"Not much—but enough for his reputation. He fitted out a ship at his own expense against the Spaniards, and, when the news came that the

enemy had sailed from Corunna, he left his bride on his wedding-day to join Drake in Plymouth Sound. When the great fleet appeared off the coast, he was one of the first to attack them, and hung upon their skirts through days and nights of storm and battle, till nothing remained of the expedition but wrecks and shattered hulls. Then he returned home, covered with wounds, and was nursed for many months by his young wife—you may see her miniature in the cabinet yonder—but eventually recovered, and lived long and worthily on his paternal acres. He was the father of your ancestor, who went to America, and of mine, who had the honour of being imprisoned by Cromwell."

This was a long speech for the Squire, and he stopped exhausted at the end of it. Then, after resting for a few moments, he led the way to some of the other chambers, and showed the state beds, with their rich, but faded curtains and coverlets; the old, roomy wardrobes, the ponderous furniture; the quaint decorations, the Flemish tapestry, the Venetian mirrors. But,

when he came to one door, he gave an involuntary shudder, and passed on without opening it. The Vicar touched Reginald on the arm, and whispered: "That was the nursery."

After they had looked over the house, they returned to the library, and the Squire pressed his visitors to take some refreshment, which they declined with thanks. Before bidding them farewell, he invited Reginald to repeat his visit, and then added, turning to the Vicar:

"It is a long time since you dined with me, my old friend, and I hope you will allow me to fix a day shortly, when my health permits, for you, and your daughter, and Captain Vaughan, to give me the pleasure of your company."

"We shall be very happy to do so, Squire," responded the Vicar, heartily. "At least, I can answer for myself, and I think for the other two."

"For me, certainly," said Reginald. "I have been too much gratified by the kind reception I have met with not to wish to cultivate the acquaintance of the head of my house."

"There might be a question as to that title,"

replied the Squire, though evidently pleased with the appellation. "You belong to the elder branch."

And so, with mutual courtesies, the Squire and his guests parted, and the latter once more took the nearest road to the village.

"You must be gifted with magical power," said the Vicar to his young friend; "for you have worked such wonders on the Squire as I could not have believed possible. You will now be able to see as much of Aldersleigh as you please, and I hope it will lead to your making a long sojourn in our neighbourhood. But you must not remain where you are. I can find you a bed at the Vicarage."

"I hardly know how to thank you for all your kindness, my dear sir, but you will greatly oblige me if you will let me stop at the 'Blue Lion.' I have clean sheets and good plain food, which is all that a soldier can require; and—and—in fact, you must excuse me if I do not accept your offer. I shall often avail myself of your permission to pay you a visit."

"I hope so, my dear fellow. At all events, you must come home with me to dinnner. My housekeeper will say I am again late, and I shall need the protection of your presence."

To this Reginald made no objection, and the two friends went on their way together.

CHAPTER VI.

SUNDAY.

THE afternoon and evening were spent very pleasantly at the Vicarage. Mary was much interested in the narrative of the interview with the Squire, and supplied many instances of his kindness of heart from recollections of her own childhood. The conversation at table was lively and agreeable, and after dinner, while Mary went to visit some poor people in the village, and the Vicar was busy with his sermon, Reginald had ample opportunity to examine the cherished black-letter volumes. Then tea was served in the garden, with due accompaniment of fruit and flowers, and the friendly English meal wore its most cheerful aspect, in the midst of the green

lawn, and beneath the sunset sky. They lingered in the warm, balmy air till the last gleam of day had faded into twilight, and then withdrew to the house, where Mary sat down to her small cottage piano. She played and sang sweetly, with inborn taste and feeling—chiefly old ballads and national airs—and Reginald joined her in one or two duets, with his rich, manly voice. The Vicar listened complacently, as he turned over the pages of a magazine, or gazed tranquilly at the moon shining through the open window. It was late in the evening before Reginald retired to his inn.

The next morning was Sunday, and the young American came early to church. The health of the Squire did not often permit his attendance at public worship, and the great square pew was empty; but several families of the neighbouring gentry were present, and the rest of the church was well filled with the inhabitants of the village, and the farmers and peasantry of the adjoining country. Mary entered with the schoolchildren, whom she had been teaching, and went quietly to the organ, on which she was accustomed to play

during the service. The Vicar read the noble Liturgy as we can seldom hope to hear it—solemnly, earnestly, with the full effect of its stately and magnificent rhythm, but without any trick or affectation, or dull, monotonous chant. And when he ascended the pulpit, his kindly and simple manner at once won the congregation to listen to his words. It was a short sermon, with no display of learning in it, or controversy, or argument of any kind; but it went straight home to the hearts of his hearers. The subject was the Raising of the Widow's Son; and he so told the tale that every one, even the slowest, could realize the scene; and when he concluded, if nothing had been *proved* by the discourse, all there had been touched, and softened, and made better by it; and every parent thought more tenderly of his children, and every child more gratefully of his parents, and both alike had a livelier faith in that Divine Master, of whose infinite love all human affections are but the faint, imperfect image.

After the service, Reginald was again carried off

to dine at the Vicarage; and when they were seated at table, he began to question his host as to the present state and prospects of the Church of England.

"We have heard so much in America," he said, "of your divisions and difficulties, that we are puzzled what to believe. May I ask to which section of the Church you yourself belong?"

"If you mean High, or Low, or Broad," answered the Vicar, smiling, "I do not know, and am not at all anxious to discover. Party names seem to me no fit titles for a Christian clergyman. But I have friends who are called by those different appellations, all good men and true, and equally zealous in their duty."

"Do you wish me to understand that no real distinctions are expressed by those names?"

"Pardon me," said the Vicar. "In all ages there has been one class of minds that leaned to authority, to tradition, to strict rules, to the observance of ancient usages, and in general to ceremonial religion; and another which depended more on individual experience, on private inter-

pretation of supernatural truths, and on the cultivation of certain modes of feeling; and another that delighted in free inquiry, and looked at most matters in an eclectic spirit. All these exist, and have always existed, in the Church of England, and it has been her wisdom to allow them a large amount of liberty within her borders. If at times they run into excesses—if some urge untenable claims, or practise obsolete ceremonies — while others adopt narrow and puritanical views of life —and others, again, push their critical investigations to the verge of irreverence and unbelief—I confess I have no fears for the result."

"Is it that you think these extreme parties are only a small minority?" asked Reginald.

"I think so, certainly; and I have confidence in the good sense and sound principles of the main body of my countrymen, in spite of some ugly symptoms of late in our commercial morality. But my trust reposes upon another basis. I could not be a minister of the Established Religion—I could not remain so a single hour—if I were not fully convinced that she is a true Christian Church,

containing within herself all that is necessary for man's wellbeing here and hereafter, and appointed as a chosen instrument to preserve the Gospel in this land. Believing that, I care little for the vagaries of any man, or set of men, and leave the issue of these controversies to Him who can direct them as He pleases for the advancement of His kingdom."

The Vicar spoke with a sincerity which no one could doubt for a moment, and which must have commanded the respect even of opponents to his creed. By his present auditors he was listened to with affectionate reverence, and there was a silence of some minutes before Reginald resumed the conversation.

"I gather from what you say, that you are no advocate for changes in ritual or doctrine?"

"I should be sorry to see any rash hand meddle with the Prayer Book. I am sure that, in the prevailing temper of men's minds, we should not improve on the work of the Reformation; and, without claiming an infallibility, which the Church repudiates in her Articles, I believe there is very

little to improve. As it is, the old formularies admit of great latitude of opinion, while they serve as a check on the extremes of which we were speaking. Any alteration might make the Church less tolerant and less free."

"Papa," said Mary, "the schoolchildren sometimes ask me questions about these things, which I find it impossible to answer."

"Then, my love, you are only in the position of all the divines and all the philosophers in existence. There are questions which none of them can answer; only do not be afraid to let the children see that it is so. You have no difficulty in making them understand what they ought to *do?*"

"No," said Mary; "it is when they ask *why*."

"Exactly—when they get into metaphysics. Tell them at once that there are many things beyond the reach of our knowledge, but that we are all able to learn our duty to God and to our neighbour. The Church Catechism is an excellent guide in these matters."

The conversation now became less serious, and

was enlivened by some amusing stories of Mary and her pupils. So the dinner-hour wore away, and it was time for afternoon church. The service was performed as reverently as in the morning, though in presence of a much smaller congregation; but there was no sermon, for the Vicar knew his audience, and held it inexpedient to tax too much their powers of attention. Instead of a set discourse, there was a brief catechising of the children, and Reginald was pleased to observe, from their manner of answering, how completely the good pastor had won the confidence of the younger members of his flock.

Then the Vicar went to call on some sick folk, who had not been able to come to church, and Mary strolled with Reginald in the direction of Aldersleigh. There was something about this girl which made all she did innocent and becoming, and wherever she had been met, or in whatever company, no thought of harm would ever have entered the minds of the inhabitants of St. Mary's-in-the-Wold. Yet some of the gossips may be forgiven if they lingered on their way to look

after the young lady and her companion, and remarked to each other that those two would make a handsome pair. It was only a natural expression of admiration for manly grace and feminine beauty, mingled with a warm feeling of interest in her who had long been as a daughter to them all.

Unconscious of attracting notice, the young people talked freely together on their road to the park. Mary was more than usually animated, for the theme was her father and his merits.

"You may like him, everybody likes him," she was saying, "but you cannot possibly tell what he is on so short an acquaintance. You must know him as I know him, before you learn how good, how generous, how self-sacrificing he really is!"

"He seems to me the perfect model of a parish priest," answered Reginald, "such as I have read of in poetry, and fancied in my happiest dreams. You cannot imagine how refreshing it is, Miss Goodenough, to one who has lived of late amid scenes of war and rapine, to find himself in the calm atmosphere of this place, and subject to the benign influence of such a man as your father."

"War must be very dreadful," said Mary, "especially civil war. I often think of it, and feel how grateful we ought to be, that it has been so long kept away from our English homes. Yet I suppose it has a strange fascination, and that military glory will always be followed and admired."

"It is like most other passions—a short madness; and it no doubt has its uses in carrying on the history of the world. I have little toleration for those who take to war as a trade, or look on it as a mere pastime and excitement. But honour and duty require that we should be ready to fight for our country; and, when once engaged, the martial spirit rises with the struggle and the danger. The very sound of cannon has a fierce music in it, and men advancing to battle, with strung nerves and bounding pulses, have no leisure to think of the blood and misery they will leave behind them."

"But after the battle, Captain Vaughan!"

"Well, Miss Goodenough, it is a piteous sight. Soldiers get used to it, as butchers do to the

shambles; but it is not the less a frightful thing to gaze on a field strewed with the wounded and the dying. And then the poor women and children! and all the excesses and wanton injuries of a campaign! If great and heroic virtues are learned in the school of arms, hideous vices grow up and flourish on the same soil, and brave men have the mortification of knowing, that ruffians, who gave them no assistance in the moment of peril, can yet disgrace them afterwards by plunder and deeds of violence. Taken at the best, war is a terrible necessity; and I hope with all my heart you may never see it near."

"I hope and pray it may never come near this country. But is it not strange that those who fear it the most—particularly women—should take so much pleasure in hearing of warlike incidents and adventures?"

"I do not think that so strange. Fearful as well as beautiful objects interest the imagination, and we all like to hear descriptions of such things as shipwrecks and earthquakes, though I suppose very few of us would wish to be in the midst of

them. If you are fond of military narratives, I dare say I could tell you some."

"There is nothing I like better—except, perhaps, ghost-stories and fairy-tales."

Then Reginald summoned up his recollections of a soldier's life, and related many anecdotes and described many scenes of the late war. He spoke with genuine modesty of the part he had taken in the events he painted, but could not wholly exclude himself from the picture; and when he told of wonderful exploits, proud triumphs, and sad reverses—

> 'Of most disastrous chances,
> Of moving accidents by flood and field,
> Of hair-breadth 'scapes in the imminent deadly breach—'

Mary, like Desdemona of old, could not choose but listen with a personal interest and sympathy. So the time passed away unheeded, as they roamed through the woods of Aldersleigh, and the sun was already low in the heavens before they thought of returning to the village.

"I must hear the rest another time, Captain Vaughan—that is, if you will be kind enough to

tell me more—but now (forgive the bathos!) we shall be too late for tea."

"And very well for us, Miss Goodenough, that we can get back so easily to the pleasant, every-day home life. I trust I have done with war, and all its glory and suffering, except in memory."

"You have made up your mind, then, to turn your sword into a reaping-hook?"

"Or, perhaps, into a goose-quill. I am no soldier of fortune, to go about the world and offer my sword to the highest bidder, or even to what may seem the fairest cause. I should never have drawn it, except in defence of my native State; and now that she has fallen, it may rust in its scabbard—unless, indeed, I settle in England, and my adopted country should require the services of all her citizens."

"You would fight for England then?"

"If I enjoyed her freedom, and lived under the protection of her laws, I would undoubtedly do my best to guard her from injury. Besides, she is the land of my fathers, and I have sufficient interest in

these old woods, and this smiling landscape, to strike a blow in their defence."

"And where do you think of settling?"

"That depends—well, it depends on many things. A short time ago, I had thoughts of travelling on the Continent; now, I am more inclined to dream of an English home. But I am comparatively a poor man, Miss Goodenough; that is, I have saved but a small part of my inheritance; and, although I have enough for my own moderate wants, I should not have the means—to—to make such a home as I wish for."

"Could you not enter some profession?"

"That is what I intend doing. I had begun the study of the law in my own country, before the commencement of our troubles, and I think of going to the English Bar. With us, as far back as the days of Burr and Hamilton, the change from soldier to lawyer has not been an uncommon one. The combative faculty finds employment in both vocations."

"And in both, I suppose," said Mary, "a man may bear himself like a true knight, or a false craven."

"Certainly. He may fight like a gentleman, or like a brigand. There are some of the latter sort, I fear, in every profession."

"And some of the former too, I hope, or the world would be a sad place to live in. But there is my dear father, talking to Morris, the Squire's bailiff. I am glad he was not at home first, and waiting for us."

When they came up with the Vicar, they found him engaged in conversation with a jolly-looking man of the farmer class, who was loud on the subject of the cattle-plague.

"I tell you what it is, sir—I've always said, no good would ever come of dealing with them foreigners. If the murrain spreads through the country, we've nobody to thank but them as brings over outlandish cattle, to eat up our English grass. Give me good Herefordshire stock of the right, native breed, and none of your long-legged animals, that look more like jackasses than oxen!"

"But, my dear Morris, you could never keep the markets supplied with your Devons and Herefords, and butcher's meat is dear enough already.

If you shut out the foreigners, many a poor man must go with half a dinner."

"Well, sir, he'd better have half a dinner than none at all. What will he do if all our poor beasts should catch the plague?"

"I am not afraid of that, Morris. The Government will, I hope, take every rational precaution, and we must use all human means, as far as our knowledge goes; but my trust is in Him who has never yet failed to give us our daily food."

"Well, sir, I don't know. What with them papists, and one thing or the other, I don't see how we can expect a blessing."

"Nonsense, Morris. If you really thought we were in such danger, you would not keep that fine, fresh colour in your cheeks. But, in any case, do not trouble yourself about the papists, or about other people's sins, national or particular. Let us all repent of our own, and strive to lead better lives for the future, and fear God, and love our neighbours; and I see no reason to believe that we shall not be protected as heretofore."

"Well, sir, I hope it may be so; but I never

saw any good come of foreigners. Your servant, Miss Mary. Your servant, sir. I meant no affront in what I said about foreigners; but I didn't know you were so near at hand."

"Why, you don't call Captain Vaughan a foreigner, do you, Morris? One of the Vaughans of Aldersleigh, whose fathers were on the land before the days of King Cole!"

"I beg pardon, sir, I'm sure; but I meant no offence."

"And I hope, Mr. Morris," said Reginald, "that we may be better acquainted. The Squire has given me permission to go all over the estate, and I shall need your kind assistance to see it thoroughly. You will find, at all events, that I have an English tongue in my head."

"So you have, lad," said the bailiff, heartily; "and I only wish there was a young gentleman like you at the Hall to cheer up the Squire in his old days. Good-evening, sir. I shall always be at your service when you want me. Good-evening, Doctor. Good-evening, Miss Mary. I'll never insult a man again by calling him

a foreigner until I've waited to hear him speak."

"There goes a strange compound," said the Vicar, as the bailiff took his departure. "As honest a fellow as ever breathed, and a good farmer too, but full of crotchets and prejudices, such as only come to perfection in our island. But how is this, Mary? I expected to be well scolded for keeping the tea waiting."

"I must get the scolding this time, papa, unless Captain Vaughan is willing to bear part of the blame."

"All of it, if you please, Miss Goodenough; but I shall plead your company as my sufficient excuse."

They went round by the village-green, for the Vicar liked to show himself amongst his flock on the Sunday evening. His precepts and example had established a happy mean between puritanical austerity and irreverent license. There was no rioting or drunkenness, neither was there any unnatural gloom. The people sat before the doors of their cottages, the men smoking their

pipes together, and the women chatting with their neighbours; the lads and lasses walked about in company; the children played merrily on the turf. The good pastor had a kind word for all, and, wherever he passed, he seemed to diffuse a bright and cheerful spirit. He held that innocent enjoyment is not the worst way of proving our gratitude to Heaven.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DINNER AT THE HALL.

REGINALD now went often to Aldersleigh, and, when the Squire was not well enough to receive him, the servants had orders to admit him to any part of the house he chose. He soon became familiar with all the treasures of the place, and had also gone over the estate in company with Morris. Notwithstanding the neglected aspect of the park, he found the farms in good order, thanks to the care of the bailiff, and learned to respect the sterling qualities of that obstinate personage. But his favourite haunts were the woods behind the Hall, where he would spend hours in dreaming over the past, and perhaps in speculating on the future. Mary, who

was a very busy little woman, with her housekeeping, her schools, and her poor, could yet find time for sketching occasionally; and the two young people would sometimes meet in the park or its vicinity; but it was in the evening, at the Vicarage, that they chiefly saw each other, and often through the long summer day Reginald waited impatiently for the happy moments at its close.

More than three weeks passed away in this manner before the Squire could make up his mind to give his promised invitation. Then it was delivered in due form; and, at the appointed hour, the weather having turned to rain, the old carriage from Aldersleigh, now but seldom used, was sent down to the village to fetch the Vicar and his companions. The Squire received them all with a kindly stateliness, but there was something almost affectionate in his welcome of Mary.

"It is so long since I have seen you in this house, my dear, that I am afraid you will not feel as much at home as I could wish. But I have

asked two of your old friends to meet you—Mrs. Graham and Miss Prior."

"When I do not feel at home at Aldersleigh, my dear sir, I must have forgotten all your kindness to me from the time I was a very little girl. Still, I shall be delighted to see Mrs. Graham and Miss Prior."

These were two elderly ladies—sisters—who lived in a pretty cottage at a little distance from the park, and who had known Mary from her birth, having been intimate friends of her mother. Mrs. Graham was the widow of an old Indian general, who had left her with a small income and an only son to educate, and she and her maiden sister (who was commonly called Aunt Jane) had devoted themselves almost entirely to the care of this boy. They had denied themselves many things, that he might have every advantage of instruction and training, and had seen him grow up into a fine, manly youth; and then he had taken his departure for that eastern land where his father had fought and died, and they knew that long years must pass away before they

could hope to look upon his face again, if, indeed, ever in this world. But such griefs as these are of daily occurrence; they are part of the price which England pays for empire.

When the two ladies arrived at the Hall—the one plump and matronly, in black satin, with great quickness and cleverness in her countenance; the other slender and fragile, in a dress of dove-coloured silk, with mild eyes and an expression of extreme gentleness; but both having the appearance of amiable and well-bred women—the Squire exerted himself to the utmost to receive them with the punctilious courtesy of his younger days. The Vicar greeted them with the freedom of an old friend; and Mary, who looked charming in her white muslin, with a single rose in her hair, welcomed them with all the joy of a child at the sight of familiar faces. Reginald was presented in turn; and his handsome person, combined with a manner at all times delicate and respectful towards the sex, seemed to make a favourable impression on both the sisters.

When dinner was announced, the Squire having

to take in Mrs. Graham, and the Vicar Miss Prior, Mary fell to the care of Reginald, and found herself seated beside him at table. It was a well-matched and sociable party, although the master of the house retained some of his habitual reserve, and was also physically incapable of contributing any large share to the conversation.

"And when did you hear from India, my dear Mrs. Graham?" said the Vicar. "I hope all is going on satisfactorily in that quarter."

"Thank you, we had a very nice letter by the last mail. Arthur was quite well, and desired to be particularly remembered to his old playmate Mary."

"I am so glad he is well," said Miss Good-enough, with real pleasure sparkling in her eyes, but with no blush or flutter to indicate any warmer feeling than sisterly regard. "Please tell him, when you write, that the trees he planted in our garden are all alive and flourishing."

"Ah, poor boy!" sighed Miss Prior; "I am afraid they will be old trees before he sees them again."

"I hope it will not be so very long. And you know, Aunt Jane, it was his own choice, and that no one could have prevented his going."

"Well, my dear, perhaps not," answered Miss Prior; but she spoke as if she had some doubt on that part of the subject.

"Come, come," interposed the Vicar, "we will not think of him less cheerfully than he would himself wish. A soldier must serve his queen and country wherever he is wanted, and the same kind Providence will watch over him there as here. What a blessing it is that our modes of communication are so much easier than formerly, and that we can hear so much oftener from our friends at a distance!"

"I suppose it is a blessing," said the Squire, "for those who have friends in different parts of the world; but with regard to news, these constant telegrams only perplex and annoy me. Formerly, we could master one thing at a time; now, before we are able to take in a single piece of intelligence, we are confused and unsettled by another of quite an opposite character."

"We hear all sides of the question, my dear sir, and so have some chance of learning the truth at last."

"No, no, Doctor; I should never think of looking for truth in the newspapers. I have given that up long ago. They have all their own purposes to serve, and each arranges his narrative accordingly."

"Yet any one who has been accustomed to the American press," said Reginald, "is astonished at the general fairness and accuracy of the English journals. They have their party views, of course, and they say hard things of their political opponents, but they do not seem to me to distort facts, and they certainly keep remarkably free from private slander."

"What offends me the most," said Mrs. Graham, "is the way in which some of them change their opinions with every turn of fortune. In the late American war, how wonderfully their views altered, according to the success or failure of the Southern arms!"

"I fear it is in human nature madam, to be

dazzled with success, and there will always be plenty of people to trample on a fallen cause. It is not peculiar to journalists."

"It is peculiar to scoundrels, though!" cried the Squire, with sudden vehemence. "I beg your pardon, ladies, but the baseness of these public writers puts me beyond my patience."

"We must admit, however," observed the Vicar, "that people may sometimes honestly change their opinions with a change of circumstances."

"I hope you are not turning Jesuit, Doctor," said Mrs. Graham, with a smile. "Nobody denies that people may change their opinions; only it looks awkward, you know, if they do it just at the convenient moment, and always desert a sinking ship, and pay homage to the rising sun."

"I am neither a Jesuit nor a Vicar of Bray, my dear madam, and I quite agree with you in the main. Still I think we are often too ready with our charges of dishonesty. Politics are a tangled skein, which we may not be able to unravel until the progress of events gives us the clue. I have had to modify too many of my own

notions to be very severe on the inconsistencies of other men."

"Does that mean," said their host, "that you are coming round to my principles, Doctor?"

"Whigs and Tories are not so far apart as they were some years ago, Squire. Because I have been a Reformer, it does not follow that I am now a Revolutionist; and if you were to stand for the county, and had to make a speech, you would be astonished how liberal you had grown. Talking of that, do you take much interest in the elections?"

"So little that I scarcely know how they are going. New men, new measures, a new world—what have I to do with it all?"

"I see," said Reginald, "that a Mr. Higgins has been returned for one of the northern boroughs. I believe I made his acquaintance lately at Malvern."

"What! the vulgar, ignorant man you were describing to us!" exclaimed Mary. "I should never have supposed it possible."

"Many things are possible with money and impudence, my dear," said the Vicar.

"I do not know how it is," remarked Miss Prior, "but I never could feel the slightest interest in politics. A woman's thoughts are occupied with such different ideas."

"It is well when it can be so," replied the Vicar. "In a settled country like England women may, if they please, leave affairs of state to their husbands and brothers, and give their undivided attention to family and social duties. It is, I think, the better and happier lot. But in times of war and revolution it would not be in their power to remain neutral."

"And when required," said Reginald, "I have found them equal to every danger and sacrifice. Still, I agree with Dr. Goodenough, that the quiet, domestic life is preferable."

"It is more to my taste, certainly," said Mary; "yet I like to know what is going on in the world."

"And why should the two things be incompatible?" asked Mrs. Graham. "A woman who stays at home may yet look out of the window."

"To be sure," answered the Vicar. "I should

consider it the greatest calamity if women were generally exposed to the heat and glare of public life. It would deprive them of half their grace and charm. I think, too, that they are more usefully and happily employed in a narrower sphere. But I see no reason why an intelligent woman, if so inclined, should not be fully acquainted with the history of passing events, and form as clear and sound a judgment about them as any man."

"And we must not forget," said Reginald, "that one of a woman's most important duties would seem to require some such knowledge. She has to train the men of the coming generation, and she can only teach them what she herself understands. The patriots of every country would, I think, agree in this—that their first and best lessons were derived from a mother's lips."

And so the conversation proceeded, shifting from one topic to another, till the dinner had gone pleasantly by, and it was time for the ladies to withdraw. Then the Squire, though too feeble

and tired for talk, begged Reginald to give him some account of the American Vaughans, and listened attentively to whatever he could learn of the family story. Reginald's grandfather, notwithstanding the loyalist and conservative tendencies of his race, had, like Washington, taken part in the War of Independence. He had served as a very young man with considerable distinction, and, after the peace, was engaged for a time in politics; but he was a Federalist of the old school, a friend of Alexander Hamilton, and, when Jefferson and the democracy triumphed over all their opponents, he retired from public life and went to reside quietly on his estate. There the family had remained in opulent and dignified seclusion, holding quite aloof from political affairs, till the breaking out of the Civil War between the two sections of the republic. Then they felt that they had no choice but to take up arms, at the summons of the sovereign State to which they belonged, and, having once decided to do so, they threw life and fortune into the venture with the spirit of gentlemen and

cavaliers. Death and ruin were the consequences of that generous devotion; but the family honour had been maintained, the old 'scutcheon was unsullied, and Reginald could look his English kinsman proudly in the face, conscious that he had no need to blush for the degeneracy of any of his name.

When they joined the ladies in the smaller drawing-room, the Squire tried to enter into conversation; but the unusual excitement of receiving company had overpowered him with fatigue, and he fell asleep unawares in a corner of one of the old couches. Anxious not to disturb his slumbers, Miss Prior beckoned Reginald and Mary to the other end of the apartment, where they amused themselves with looking over some books of rare engravings, while the Vicar and Mrs. Graham, seated in the recess of a window, talked together in low tones that were inaudible to any but themselves.

"I like your young friend very much," said the lady; "but have you ascertained who and what he is?"

"What he is, my dear madam?—why, a young American gentleman, and a member of the Vaughan family."

"Yes, yes, Doctor; that is all right enough. But what are his connexions, his antecedents, and his prospects? I claim the privilege of an old friend, and it is for dear Mary's sake that I wish to know."

"For Mary's sake? Why, what in the world has she to do with it?"

"Has it really never struck you that this intimacy of the young people may ripen into something more serious? One cannot look at them without seeing how well they are matched; and a woman must be very slow who does not perceive his admiration for your daughter. Besides, what has kept him in this neighbourhood for the last three weeks?"

"Only his desire to be near Aldersleigh."

"Malvern would have been near enough. I do not think he would have put up at the 'Blue Lion,' if its vicinity to the manor-house had been the only attraction."

"But I offered him a bed at the Vicarage, and he refused."

"Did you indeed? Well, you are the kindest and simplest of men, my dear old friend. Now, remember, I do not question this young gentleman's honourable motives; but our Mary's happiness is too precious a thing to be risked on any uncertainty."

"It is all a mistake, depend upon it, my dear Mrs. Graham. Such an idea never occurred to me. Captain Vaughan lives amongst the poets of yore, and Mary is a mere child."

"Poetry and love sometimes go together, and the child has grown into a woman before you knew it. Now listen to me, my dear Doctor. If Mary were one of our modern young ladies, who talk slang as fast as their brothers, read nothing but sensation novels, and play at croquet with half the county—flirting with the captain one week, and the curate another, just to keep their hands in, you know—but taking good care to remain heart-whole and fancy-free till the eligible match offers—we might safely leave her to her

[illegible] sure that, whatever happened, her [illegible] would be her first consideration. But Mary is quite different from all this."

"She is—what her mother was at her age," said the Vicar, with a sigh.

"Precisely. She is a gentle, trusting, affectionate, self-sacrificing creature, such as we used to think a true woman ought to be; and depend upon it, whoever she loves, it will be with her whole heart. She will never do anything wrong; but an unfortunate attachment might make her very miserable."

"You frighten me!" said the Vicar. "I had never thought of these things with reference to Mary. To have her always with me, always under my care—but I know it cannot be, and I am a selfish old fellow to cherish the illusion."

"We should all like to keep our children with us," replied the widow, with a touch of deep feeling in her tone. "But they leave us, you and girls alike. It was once a fancy of your Mary would keep my Arthur at [illegible] very fond of her, poor lad! but

own devices, sure that, whatever happened, her self-interest would be her first consideration. But Mary is quite different from all this."

"She is—what her mother was at her age," said the Vicar, with a sigh.

"Precisely. She is a gentle, trusting, affectionate, self-sacrificing creature, such as we used to think a true woman ought to be; and depend upon it, if ever she loves, it will be with her whole heart. She will never do anything wrong; but an unfortunate attachment might make her very miserable."

"You frighten me!" said the Vicar. "I had never thought of these things with reference to Mary. To have her always with me, always under my care—but I know it cannot be, and I am a foolish old fellow to cherish the illusion."

"We should all like to keep our children with us," replied the widow, with a touch of deep sadness in her tone. "But they leave us, you see, boys and girls alike. It was once a fancy of mine, that your Mary would keep my Arthur at home. He was very fond of her, poor lad! but

she never looked on him as anything more than a brother—and now there is no chance of their meeting for many, many years."

"Bless me!" cried the Vicar; "I never thought of that either! I am afraid we men are very stupid in matters of this sort. Supposing, however, that you are right in your conjecture as to this young gentleman, you do not doubt his honour, and you would not have me treat him with discourtesy or suspicion?"

"Certainly not, my dear Doctor. I would simply have you use such watchfulness, where your daughter's happiness is concerned, as her poor mother would have done, had she been living."

"Thank you," said the Vicar, pressing the hand of his old friend. "I will try to act with more discretion. But, after all, I know my daughter, and I have faith in that young soldier's manly face. I cannot bring myself to be very much alarmed about them."

Here the Squire awoke from his slumbers, and, after a brief interval, the guests prepared to take

their leave. The old carriage was soon once more in request, and, having first conveyed the two ladies to their home, returned to fetch the Vicar and his party to the village. The Squire retired to rest, wearied by the exertions of the evening, but also a little cheered by the revival of friendly associations.

"My dear Jane," said Mrs. Graham, when the two sisters were seated together in their own cottage, "the Vicar is the best of men, but as ignorant of the world as our cat. He lets his daughter form the closest intimacy with a young man, of whom he knows nothing, except that he can read Chaucer and Spenser."

"Well, sister, he is a very nice young man, and quite a gentleman, and one of a good family and if he and Mary should like each other (now that poor Arthur is out of the question) I cannot see the least objection to it."

"Why, Jane, you are as bad as the Vicar. Of course, he is a nice young man, and may be everything we could wish; but what do we know about him?"

"You may judge a good deal by physiognomy."

"You may judge of taste, temper, intellect, even character to a certain extent; but how are you to judge whether he has house, lands, or money to keep a wife, or what ties he may have left behind him in Virginia?"

"I would take his word for it," said Miss Prior. "I think, sister, we may be over-cautious. Many a love-story has been spoiled by too much anxiety about the future."

And the memory of the pale, gentle lady, went back to a summer's evening long ago, when an engagement, which most people deemed imprudent, was broken off by the intervention of well-meaning friends; and her imagination recalled the last, despairing look of the young sailor, who the next day quitted England, never to return to it again.

"Yes, dear, it may be so," said Mrs. Graham, who guessed her thoughts. "But there is a medium between rashness and over-caution. You must remember that Mary has no mother, and I

would only do for her what I would for a girl of my own."

Meanwhile, the Vicar sat brooding over the words of his old friend, and, although he dismissed as unworthy of him all doubt of Reginald's honourable intentions, he could not help thinking of Mary more anxiously than he had hitherto done. But the good man had one unfailing refuge in every trouble. Before he lay down that night, he opened his heart in prayer, and commended his child to the protection of that Heavenly Father who alone is able to order all things for the best. Then he sought his pillow with a mind at ease, and slept as calmly as an infant.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LADY'S OAK.

"MY dear," said the Vicar to his daughter, the next morning at breakfast, "where are you going to-day?"

"I was thinking, papa, as I have nothing very important to keep me at home, of walking over to the park, and making a sketch of the Lady's Oak."

"And what has put that into your head, my dear?"

"Captain Vaughan would like to have a sketch of it, as one of the most picturesque things about the old place, and I have promised to do one for him."

"Umph!" said the Vicar, with a slight contraction of the brows. "I suppose it is thought all right in these days for young ladies to make presents to young gentlemen?"

"Papa!" cried Mary, opening her blue eyes very wide with astonishment; "it never struck me as a present, or anything of that sort. It is natural he should wish for some memorial of Aldersleigh, and I am the only one here that can draw a little. But, of course, if you do not approve of it, I will ask to be excused."

"I never said I did not approve of it, my dear. In fact, it was very kind of you to make the offer. But why should he wish for a memorial of Aldersleigh when he has the place itself close at hand?"

"He is going away very soon, papa."

"Indeed! and where, pray, is he going?"

"I believe he is going to study law in London," said Mary, with perfect simplicity. "But why do you not ask him yourself?"

"Because I do not appear to be so much in his confidence."

"Now, papa, that is really a little unjust. You know that you always begin about old poets, or antiquities, or politics, or theology, and he thinks those subjects interest you more than his own affairs, and, therefore, does not like to trouble you with these. If he has ever mentioned them to me, it was only because he had no one else to talk to. I am sure, if you gave him the opportunity, he would be very glad of your advice."

"Well, Mary, you are probably right—so take your sketch-book, and never mind what I have been saying. I shall walk over to Aldersleigh myself by-and-by, to see how the Squire is after his party, and I dare say I shall fall in with you, if I come round by the Lady's Oak."

Mary kissed her father, and ran off to fetch her straw hat and waterproof mantle, and in a few minutes she was on her way to Aldersleigh, with her sketch-book under her arm. There had been rain in the night, and the drops still glittered on every leaf and blade of grass, but the sky was clear, and the sun shining. The young girl enjoyed the freshness and beauty of the morning,

but her father's words had troubled her a little. It had never before occurred to her (any more than to Dr. Goodenough, until the previous evening) that there was anything peculiar in her intimate relations with Reginald; yet now the Vicar's questions had raised some doubt in her mind. She knew that she liked the young soldier's company, and took a warm interest in his fate. If any deeper feeling lurked in her bosom, it had hitherto been hidden, even from herself, by the veil of maiden modesty. Now she began to look into her own heart. Ignorance of all danger had made her bold; the first gleam of consciousness rendered her timid. But she was too pure and noble to give way to needless fears, too simple and sincere to affect any wayward coyness, and she resolved, in the true spirit of her father's child, that, as there had been no shadow of harm in her thoughts of Reginald, so there should be no difference in her conduct towards him.

"At all events," she said, "I will not make myself ridiculous. I know he regards me as a friend, and will always remember with kindness

the country girl who helped to cheer a few weeks of his life. And the memory of the time we have spent together will be very pleasant to me also—yes, pleasant, although I shall sadly miss his company. But I have no reason to suppose he ever thought of me in any other way, and I am not going to act as if I believed so, merely because somebody else may choose to fancy it. Only, what could have made papa talk as he did just now?"

Thus musing, she drew near to the Lady's Oak. It was one of the oldest and finest trees in the park, and had long been celebrated for the girth of its trunk and the mighty sweep of its spreading branches. There was of course a tradition that some lady of Aldersleigh had met some stranger knight in its shade, and that fatal consequences had followed on the meeting; but who the lady was, or when she lived, seemed altogether uncertain. The tree was in itself sufficiently beautiful, without the additional interest of tender or tragic story, and people came from a distance to see and admire it. Mary chose the

best point of view, and, seating herself on a mossy stump hard by, she proceeded rapidly with her sketch.

When she had worked hard for about an hour, she was roused by a rustling amongst the fern, and, looking up, saw Reginald approaching with quick and eager step.

"I did not know you were here," he said, "but caught a glimpse of you by chance, as I was going up to the wood. How kind of you to have begun the sketch!"

She blushed a little, but smiled also, and held out her hand as frankly as usual. He took it with friendly warmth, and came round to examine the drawing.

"How much you have done already! and what a charming picture it will make! At this rate, it will soon be finished; else I was going to beg you to send it after me."

"Are you leaving immediately?" she asked, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"I must not lose any more time. Now that I have resolved to set to work, the sooner I begin

the better. I am as anxious to earn money as the keenest Yankee."

"I should never have thought you would have been much influenced by that motive."

"Ah, Miss Goodenough! it all depends upon what money will buy. There may be a few misers, who desire it simply for its own sake; but most men have some vision of happiness, which they think to purchase by its aid. Some long for ease and pleasure, some for power and display, while others again only wish for riches, that they may share them with those they love."

"But riches are not essential to happiness. Look at my dear father. He has been a poor man all his life because he would never seek for preferment, and because much of his income has been spent in charity. He would never even keep a horse for himself, because he said he was quite able to walk, and what he saved by going on foot enabled him to help the lame and bedridden. Yet I suppose there is not a happier man in England."

"Granted. But he too may have sometimes wished for money, if only to use it in the same

noble manner. There are very few, however, that are so unselfish as he is. I confess that my dreams point to a definite plan of happiness for myself."

"I can only hope you may realize it, for I feel sure it would not be anything wrong or extravagant."

"It includes various things," continued Reginald, speaking with manifest agitation; "but they all centre in a peaceful home—a safe, quiet, comfortable, English home. I am haunted by pictures of such a dwelling, and in every picture there is another figure beside my own. I did not intend to say it now—perhaps I ought not to say it—but I have ventured to entertain a hope, a presumptuous hope it may be, that, if I had such a home, *you* might one day be induced to share it with me, and so give me the only chance of happiness that remains for me on earth."

The blood rushed to Mary's cheek and brow as she rose from her seat and dropped the sketch from her trembling hands. Reginald stooped to pick it up, and restore it to her; and then, as she

seemed about to speak, he interrupted her in tones of powerful, but restrained emotion.

"Do not answer me, I entreat you, till you have heard me to the end. Having gone thus far, I must be allowed to explain myself fully. Since I have been here, in this neighbourhood, a new sun has risen upon my life. I thought, when I left America, a wandering exile —friendless, homeless, with all my family ties broken—that I might possibly yet exchange acts of good-will with my fellow-creatures, but that no household affection would ever again warm my heart. I came here, and your father received me with paternal kindness; I saw you, and fancied I had found a sister. Every day has only confirmed that first impression of your goodness, but has also taught me that I longed to be to you something dearer than a brother. Still I have no right to ask for any response to these feelings till I am in a position to offer you a home. Heaven forbid I should abuse your father's trust! Heaven forbid I should seek to engage you by any promise! But, O Mary! O Miss Good-

enough! could I be sure that I was not quite indifferent to you—that my suit was not hopeless from the first, and might in time have a chance, only a chance, of being accepted—I should leave this place strong in heart and resolution, and go to my work with the courage that makes all things possible."

Mary blushed more deeply than before as she raised her eyes to his; and, when she spoke, her voice was low and tremulous, though wonderfully sweet and clear.

"You have taken me by surprise, Captain Vaughan, but I will answer you as truly as I can. Our acquaintance has been a very short one—too short, I think, for what you have just said. You might easily change your mind when you came to know me better. Yet I will not deny that I look on you as a valued friend—that I am very glad, very proud of your good opinion—that I would not lose it for a great deal more than I can express. I cannot go beyond this; and there is one thing which I must consider before all else. My dear father has been to me the kindest and best of

parents—father and mother both in one—and I have no brother or sister. He has only me to comfort him in his old age. Nothing would ever induce me to leave him. So it will be far wiser to let all remain just as it was. Let us continue friends—dear friends, if you will—but nothing more."

"And do you really think, Mary, that I would take you away from your father?—that I would repay his generous hospitality by robbing him of his child? Believe me, the bond between you is as sacred to me as to yourself. Besides, I have associated your image with these sylvan scenes, and to remove you from them would be like breaking the spell of an enchantment. No, my dream is to increase my small fortune sufficiently to establish a modest home in this neighbourhood, and then to ask you to be its mistress. You would remain in the old familiar places with those who have loved you from your infancy, and nothing would be changed except that *one* would be there to love you more than all. If I had sometimes to leave you—as I should have, if engaged in a pro-

fession—I should know you were safe and happy with your father and your old friends. It is all vague at present—all a shadowy sketch, like the Lady's Oak in the drawing—but it depends upon you to complete the picture in your own way."

The tears stood in Mary's eyes, as she answered: "You are very good, very kind, very considerate; only, do not ask me to say any more just now. Give me a little time for reflection."

"I will not ask you to say another word. It is enough for me that you do not utterly reject my suit. I would not, if I could, commit you to anything that you might regret hereafter. I am content to live on hope."

"And I may tell my father what has passed between us? I have never kept any secrets from him."

"I should wish you to tell him all. Only, be merciful in the summing up, and do not press the case too hardly against me."

"I will endeavour to be just," answered Mary, smiling through her tears. "And now let us talk

of other things. I suppose I am to go on with the Lady's Oak?"

"Unless you mean me to understand that you are offended with me. If you can forgive my rashness, you will at all events finish that drawing."

Mary made no reply, but sat down quietly to her work. She soon found, however, that her hand shook, and that her vision was uncertain. After several vain attempts to proceed, she gave it up in despair.

"I will go on with it another time," she said; "I am but a poor artist, and easily discouraged. In fact, you have no conception what an ignorant girl I am. I have seen so little, and learned so few accomplishments. I have never even been to school."

"So much the better, in my opinion. Where could you have found a tutor like your father?"

"Nobody could have taken more pains with me than papa, and I owe to him whatever little I know—except that my dear mother taught me music and needlework, and that Miss Prior gave

me my first lessons in drawing. But I feel so awkward in some things, and you must have met with many girls so much better informed than I am."

"I have certainly seen young ladies with many more pretensions; but I would not, for the world, have you different from what you are."

"Ah! that is because you are prejudiced in my favour."

"It is because I think I can distinguish between reality and mere show. Superficial accomplishments form but a small part of the happiness of life, and a woman's best knowledge is that which makes her useful and beloved. But here comes your father, on his way back from the Hall."

"Well, young people," said the Vicar, as he came striding towards them through a sea of fern, "how does the sketch get on?"

"Not very fast, papa; I must finish it another day."

"I have just been to call on the Squire, and find him no worse for last night's dissipation. I

think, my dear Vaughan, he would like to see you."

"Then I will go up to the Hall immediately, as I may not have many more opportunities."

"But you will come to the Vicarage afterwards?"

"Oh, yes! with your permission. Depend upon it, I wish to make the most of my time with such friends as you are."

"What does he mean by that?" said the Vicar, as Reginald hastened on his way to the old manor-house. "One would think the lad was going to leave us to-morrow."

"He means that he is going to leave us very soon. But, dear papa, I have something particular to say to you."

"Well, my love, I am quite ready to listen."

"But I hardly know how to tell you, and I think you will be very much surprised. Captain Vaughan has explained to me why he wants to go away, and to study law, and to earn money. In fact, he has asked me—that is, he has not asked me, but he has given me to understand, that he hopes one day to ask me——"

"What, Mary?"

"Cannot you guess, papa?"

"Well, my love, perhaps I can. It is generally *one* question that brings the roses to a young lady's cheek. He has asked you to be his wife?"

"Yes; but not now, papa; not like that. I must tell you all, or you will not be able to judge. You shall hear exactly how it all happened."

And with some little bashfulness, but with no concealment or affectation, Mary proceeded to give an account of her interview with Reginald.

"And you told him you could not leave your poor old daddy?" said the Vicar.

"Of course I did, papa. Nothing on earth shall ever take me away from you. And he was so kind, so generous about it, and said he would never repay your hospitality by robbing you of your child, and that he meant to come and settle in this neighbourhood."

"I have no doubt of his good intentions, Mary; but men are not always masters of their destiny, and a wife must often forget her own people and her father's house. What I should like to know

is, whether, if I were out of the question, you could trust your happiness to this young soldier."

"I think, papa, he is very good and noble."

"I think so too. But all this comes upon me very suddenly. He might have done better to wait till he had the home he talks of, before he disclosed his feelings to you. It makes a great difference in a young girl's life, Mary, when her thoughts are distracted from all her ordinary pursuits, and her mind is filled with one absorbing subject. There are many dangers and evils attendant on a long engagement."

"But he said more than once, that he did not wish to engage me to anything."

"And would my daughter allow a young man to go on working for years, in the hope of winning her, and then turn round, and tell him she had changed her mind? No, Mary; in these things there is always an engagement, expressed or understood. Not an irrevocable bond, like a monk's vow; but an obligation in honour, which should only be cancelled for some weighty cause. One hears indeed of what are called love-affairs,

which seem to be taken up and laid aside at will—foolish entanglements, without any serious meaning—but I trust my Mary could never be so involved. She will think well before she decides, and, having once decided, she will keep her faith."

"What then would you have me do, papa?"

"Pause and reflect, before taking the most important step in life. When you have considered it thoroughly, you may be sure I will aid you with the best advice in my power. But you have stayed long enough under the Lady's Oak for one morning. In spite of love, poetry, and romance, we must go home to dinner."

CHAPTER IX.

EXPLANATIONS.

IT was late in the afternoon when Reginald re turned from the Hall to the Vicarage. He found the Vicar alone in the garden, with a book in his hand, but with an expression of anxious thought on his countenance not usually seen there. Yet his manner was as kind, and his greeting as cordial as ever.

"You have paid a long visit to the Squire?"

"Yes; I have been to bid him farewell. After I parted with you in the park this morning, I made up my mind that I ought to lose no more time, but start at once for London, and set to work without delay. I told the Squire of my intention to study the law, and he has given me a

very urgent letter to his solicitor, requesting him to afford me every information and assistance."

"It is a sudden resolution—at least, so it seems to me, as I had heard nothing about it until to-day."

"You must forgive me for not consulting you; but I was wavering as to when and how I ought to begin. Miss Goodenough has perhaps told you——"

"She has told me everything, my dear boy, and it has made me both glad and sorry. I will say at once, that there are few men whom I have liked so well on so short an acquaintance, and to whom (as far as I can judge) I would more readily trust my daughter. But the mere thought of parting with her is to me very new and sad, and, in any case, it is far too serious a matter to be lightly decided on. You would have done better to have waited till your own prospects were clearer, and till you knew each other better."

"And such, believe me, was my purpose; but we Vaughans, I fear, are somewhat too liable to be swayed by sudden impulses; and this morning,

when the idea of separation came vividly before me, I could not resist the desire to speak. It may have been rash and presumptuous, but you know the old rhyme of Montrose:

> 'He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his desert is small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all.'"

"I am not accusing you of presumption, my dear boy, but simply of impatience. My daughter is no princess, whom it is treason to approach: only, she is very precious to me, and I cannot risk her happiness for any consideration. I should wish her to have full time and opportunity to make a free, unbiassed choice, and to know thoroughly what she is doing."

"And can you doubt, my dear sir, that such is my wish also? Miserable as it would make me, I would rather give her up for ever, than take any unfair advantage of the kindness and confidence you have shown me."

"I believe you entirely. Let us be quite frank with one another. Short as the time has been, I

will not pretend astonishment that a man like you should become attached to a girl like Mary. And I could not blame her, if she were to return the attachment. But there are some other things to consider. I have no fortune to give my daughter. What little I have saved will barely suffice to keep her from penury after I am gone, though, in this neighbourhood, I think she would always find friends and a home—but I have no means of aiding her in married life."

"I never expected it, my dear sir. My own income is a small one—just enough for a bachelor of moderate tastes and wishes, too little for a wife and family—but I have youth, health, and energy, and I have no fear that before long I should make a home for Mary. Only, it must be here, you know, for I could not take her away from you."

A tear stood in the eye of the Vicar as he held out his hand to Reginald. "You are a brave, true-hearted lad," he said, "and I will trust you implicitly. If you can win my daughter's love, you shall have my consent and blessing. But I would ask you to give her and yourself a little

breathing time—to let matters rest as they are for the present—and, after you have been in London for a few months, if you still remain in the same mind, you will come and pay us another visit, and then we can talk further."

"It shall be as you desire," answered Reginald. "Only, you would not wish me to conceal my feelings from your daughter?"

"That is past praying for now, I fear," said the Vicar, smiling. "But I should wish you not to urge your suit, or endeavour to engage her affections irrevocably, until some time has elapsed."

"I cannot dispute the reasonableness of the condition, however hard it may seem to me. But you will not object to my sometimes writing to her?"

"I am dealing with a man of honour, and there is no occasion to go into minute particulars. Let it be understood between us, that you will take no step to fetter my daughter's freedom, or to precipitate her decision, and I leave all the rest to your own discretion."

"I will not abuse your trust."

"I am sure you will not; so begin by clearing that tragic brow, and let us go in to tea—which reminds me that you have probably had no dinner."

"I had quite enough for luncheon at the hall."

"Nonsense, man. Heroic resolutions require substantial food. Mary, my dear, let us have up the cold beef, for here is a hungry stranger just arrived at the Vicarage. I dare say Susan could pick us a salad, and I will undertake to dress it *secundum artem.*"

The good parson knew that a social meal soon puts people at their ease, and, after the first few moments of embarrassment, they all sat down to table as if nothing unusual had happened. The Vicar was as lively and talkative as ever, and, although the young people were inclined to be silent and pensive, they caught by degrees the infection of his cheerful mood. Thus all awkwardness was avoided, and the kind old man had the pleasure of looking at happy and smiling faces.

After tea they strolled into the garden, and

then the Vicar said with a somewhat graver aspect: "Our young friend here has made up his mind to leave us, even sooner than we expected. When do you set out, Reginald?"

"I had thought of to-morrow," replied the American, with a sigh.

Mary started, but did not speak, and her father laid his hand gently on her arm. "When we have to plunge into the water," he said, "it is wise not to stand shivering on the brink. Every beginning involves some painful effort, and the sooner we get over it the better. I think Reginald is right, although I shall be loth to part with him."

"And I shall be more sorry than I can describe to leave this place. But I hope soon to be back again, and that my friends will be ready to welcome me. Even the Squire has been kind enough to express a wish for my speedy return."

"Oh, you have quite won the old gentleman's heart! His giving you a letter of introduction is a wonderful mark of confidence; and his solicitor may really be of use to you, for there are few

more sagacious men than Mr. Strong, in spite of his whims and prejudices. We were at college together, and I used to know him intimately."

"Is he at all like the Squire?"

"Well, they would agree in most of their opinions; but in other respects they are very different. Mr. Vaughan has the character of a recluse, while Strong is an active, energetic man of the world. If he takes a fancy to you, he will prove a warm and serviceable friend."

"I shall need friendly advice in London, for I have to learn everything about my new profession. It will be lonely enough there."

"Yes," said the Vicar, "it is very lonely in a great city, until we become familiar with all its ways. But you will soon get used to it."

"I have had other battles to fight," answered Reginald, with a melancholy smile, "and other sorrows to bear. But now I shall always have a bright hope before me—the hope of returning to the dear Malvern Hills."

"And we shall often think of you in your absence. I have just remembered that I too can

give you a letter to an old friend in London. I will go and write it at once."

The Vicar went into the house, and Reginald and Mary were left alone in the garden. The young soldier was the first to speak.

"You will finish the sketch of the Lady's Oak?" he said.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I shall long for it night and day till it comes. You will send it to me in the great lonely city?"

"Oh! you will have many other things to think of there."

"Of nothing so interesting as that tree and its associations. But, Mary, I must not go back to our last interview now. I have promised your father to be discreet and silent, till time has proved the sincerity of my feelings, and you have had the opportunity of testing your own. I am content to wait and hope. You will allow me to write to you now and then—as a friend?"

"I shall always be glad to hear from you."

"And you will write to me too, just to show that you have not quite forgotten me?"

"I shall not forget you," said Mary, in a very low voice.

They walked on, side by side, in silence, till Reginald stopped suddenly, and, looking down at his companion, saw that her cheeks were bathed in tears. His own eyes filled, and the blood rushed to his forehead; he trembled, as he seized her hand, and raised it passionately to his lips.

"I hope I am not breaking my word," he said, "but I cannot leave you as calmly and prudently as I ought. Could I flatter myself that those tears——"

"I am weak and foolish," she answered; "but I have never been accustomed to conceal my thoughts. I am very, very sorry, that you are going away. Your visit here has been to me a great pleasure and happiness, and I shall miss you every hour, and often wish for your return."

"A thousand thanks for that kind comfort! I will not ask for another syllable, but carry away with me the memory of what you have just said, as my best consolation in absence."

"And you must really go?"

"I think it is my duty; and I know that you will agree with the sentiment of an old song by Lovelace. He tells Lucasta that he must leave her for the wars, and then adds:

> 'Yet this inconstancy is such,
> As you too shall adore;
> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more.'"

"It is a beautiful and noble sentiment," she answered, with glistening eyes, "and I shall often repeat those lines to myself. And now, if you please, we will talk no more in a melancholy strain, but go and rejoin my father. When do you think of paying us another visit?"

"If not before, I hope, at all events, to be with you at Christmas. I have always loved the great, genial festival, and I trust this year it may be propitious to us both. The Squire asked me to come down in September, but I think I must work through the autumn, and not take any vacation till I have earned it by labour. Then I shall enjoy my holidays with a quiet conscience."

They spoke no more, but returned together to

the house, where the Vicar received them with his usual cheerfulness. He handed a letter to Reginald, addressed to a clergyman at Bethnal Green.

"You will find my friend Crosby," he said, "in one of the poorest parts of London; but I am sure he will give you a hearty welcome for my sake. I remember him a gay, high-spirited youth; but life has been a serious business with him, and has tamed him down long ago. Still, he is a man worth knowing, and one for whom I have a very tender regard."

"Then I shall indeed be glad to make his acquaintance, and I thank you very much for the letter. I shall feel quite at home with old college-friends of yours."

"Well, Crosby and Strong are two perfectly different people; but I dare say you will like them both. You must not expect either of them to know much of our old English poets."

"Oh, no; we must keep *them* for our exclusive property."

"At all events, we shall not find many to value

them as we do. Till you come back, I shall want a companion in some of my favourite studies."

"I hope, papa," said Mary, "you will let *me* share them with you."

"I shall be delighted, my love, if you really take interest in them."

"Why, papa, you know that I was always fond of the 'Fairy Queen,' and that Una and her lion were amongst my earliest friends. Then, too, I remember how you taught me to read Chaucer, and how I used to cry over poor Grisilda's sorrows. And now," she added, with a blush, "I think I shall understand those old writers better, and feel their beauties more and more."

"And often, in gloomy London," said Reginald, "I shall turn to the 'Flower and the Leaf,' or the 'Cuckoo and the Nightingale;' and their pleasant pictures will transport me to the woods of Aldersleigh."

"Papa," said Mary, "we will read those two poems together."

CHAPTER X.

THE FAMILY LAWYER.

A LITTLE to the north of Holborn, between Gray's Inn and Red Lion Square, lies Bedford Row, a region of good, substantial houses, of somewhat gloomy aspect, which are now chiefly occupied by the offices of lawyers. Thither Reginald proceeded, on the day after his return to London, and, entering one of the wide, open vestibules, knocked at an inner door, which bore the name of Mr. Strong.

Admitted by an old-fashioned clerk, dressed in white neckcloth and suit of solemn black, he was shown into the outer office, where he waited for the solicitor's leisure. A long interval of silence followed, only interrupted by the ticking of a

clock, and the scratching of pens on paper, when a door was suddenly opened, and a voice was heard speaking in a loud tone:

"I tell you, my good woman, you have no case, and, if you want to throw away your money, you must go to another lawyer."

"But surely, Mr. Strong, I have a right to do what I like with my own; and if I choose to run the risk——"

"No, madam, you have no right to squander your children's substance. At all events, I will not help you to do it."

"Well, sir, I suppose there are other solicitors to be found."

"Plenty of them, madam, who will rob you to any extent you please. But, as you will not take my advice, and my time is valuable, you must excuse my wishing you a very good-morning."

"Well, Mr. Strong, I never expected you would treat me in this way."

"I suppose you thought I would ruin you with the utmost politeness. Well, you see you were mistaken, and there is an end of the matter.

When you really want my advice, I shall always be at your service."

"Oh, I shall not trouble you again, sir."

"As you please, madam. Good-morning."

A tall, burly man, with a powerful frame, broad forehead, and thick, bushy eyebrows, came forth from the private room, accompanying a little, thin old lady, with a vinegar countenance and excited manner. They parted at the door, and the lawyer stood still for a moment, as if in troubled thought.

"I hope the stupid old woman will not ruin her family," he muttered to himself; "but you may bray a fool in a mortar, as Solomon says, without much effect. Any one waiting, Mr. Thompson?"

"This gentleman, sir, with a letter from Mr. Vaughan."

"Walk in, sir, walk in. I can only give you a few minutes. I have been occupied for the last two hours in trying to keep people from cutting their own throats. Let me see what news you bring me from Aldersleigh. Much as usual—not worse—a new acquaintance—one of the

American Vaughans—going to the bar—needs my advice and assistance—friend of Dr. Goodenough. I shall be happy to do what I can for you, sir. But this is not the place where we can talk things comfortably over. Come and dine with me in Russell Square."

"All Dr. Goodenough's friends," said Reginald, smiling, "appear to be endowed with the same spirit of hospitality. I shall have pleasure in accepting an invitation so frankly offered."

"Selfishness, my dear sir; nothing but selfishness, I assure you. Here, at the office, I have no time to talk to any one. At home, I may hope to enjoy a little rational conversation. So, if you will leave me now to my red tape and parchment. I shall be truly glad to see you at six o'clock."

"In Russell Square?" asked Reginald.

"Yes, in Russell Square—in the house where my father lived before me. My wife and daughters have often wished me to emigrate to Belgravia or Tyburnia, but I knew better than to do anything so foolish. I can only promise you a plain dinner and a hearty welcome."

"I shall not fail to be punctual; and the best thing I can do is not to detain you any longer at present. So, with many thanks for your kindness, I will take my leave at once."

"A sensible young man," said Mr. Strong, as Reginald departed; "one who understands business, and does not care about hearing himself talk. Now, Mr. Thompson, where are the papers in Smith *versus* Jones?"

And the lawyer plunged headlong into a mass of documents, which he glanced through with wonderful rapidity, marking the chief points with a pencil, and making himself master of the whole case in less time than most people would have taken to comprehend its bare outline.

At the hour of six, Reginald made his appearance in Russell Square. He was ushered into a comfortable drawing-room, solidly and handsomely furnished, where he was received by a comely matron and two sprightly girls. They were soon joined by the host himself, who had laid aside his look of hurry, but retained his habitual air of decision and energy.

"You must have thought me rather abrupt this morning," he said; "but tide, time, and law-courts wait for no man."

"Oh, if you have been to papa's office," cried one of the girls, "you are lucky to have escaped in safety! We never venture into the lion's den, for fear of having our heads snapped off."

"I only wish you cared a little more for the lion's roar. I do not know how it may be in America, Mr. Vaughan, but our young people have outgrown the primitive notions of respect for their elders and betters."

"Why, papa," said the young lady, "I was only just expressing the nervous terror we felt at approaching your sanctuary."

"Yes, yes," answered the lawyer, "I know all about your nervous terrors. They never prevent your asking for whatever you want. But tell me, Mr. Vaughan, how you left our friends in Worcestershire. I have not heard from them for some time."

"The Squire was, I should think, quite as well as usual, and Dr. Goodenough in high health and spirits."

"And Mary?" asked the daughter, who had not yet spoken. "She is one of my best friends."

"Miss Goodenough was very well, when I last saw her, thank you."

"I am glad of that," said the lawyer. "She is a good girl, who obeys her father, and respects old age. I wish I could say the same of all the young ladies of my acquaintance."

"Now really," interposed Mrs. Strong, "you have no reason to complain. You must not mind him, Mr. Vaughan, or you will draw some very unfair inferences."

"There you see the maternal instinct," returned the lawyer. "First spoil your girls, and then take their part against the world. But how long are we to wait for dinner, my dear?"

"It should have been ready by this time," said the lady, ringing the bell; "but servants, you know——"

"May be spoiled as well as children—I quite agree with you. I really think punctuality is the rarest of all the virtues!"

In a few minutes, however, dinner was an-

nounced, and, in spite of his eccentricities, Mr. Strong proved a cheerful and courteous host. The family too were all clever and lively, and the conversation never flagged during the meal.

"I presume," said Reginald to his neighbour, Miss Emma Strong, "that you know Aldersleigh well?"

"Oh, yes! I used to stop there when a little girl, in poor Mrs. Vaughan's time, and since then I have often been on a visit to Mary Goodenough. She is my best friend, as I told you, though we are so different."

"How so?" asked Reginald, with awakened interest.

"Oh, if you were intimate with Mary, you would know that she is not at all like *us!* She is so gentle, and well-behaved, and the very pink of propriety—in fact, a model of female excellence—while Charlotte and I have no such pretension."

"Speak for yourself, Emma," said her sister, from the other side of the table. "There is no use in telling the truth at all times."

"Yes, truth is unpopular, and very unfashion-

able," observed her father. "It would be much more amusing, you see, and like people of sense and spirit, if you were to pick poor Mary to pieces, and laugh at her for the general entertainment."

"No one could laugh at Mary Goodenough," said Mrs. Strong, who was less given to irony than her husband. "Even the most ill-natured could find nothing to ridicule in her. And is the dear Doctor as genial as ever? and as fond of his old poets?"

"He seems to me the most genial man I ever met with," answered Reginald, "and he lives in an atmosphere of early English poetry."

"That is the worst point about him," said Mr. Strong. "He is a very good and a very able man, but he likes a set of queer, quaint, old-fashioned authors, who wrote before the language was fully formed, and who require a glossary to understand them. There is only this to be urged in their favour, that they are at all events better than the rubbish which now passes for poetry."

"Papa is a dreadful heretic in matters of taste,"

interposed Miss Charlotte. "He can see nothing to admire in any of our living poets."

"I see nothing to admire in vague, unintelligible nonsense. My daughters would have me go into raptures over a silly youth, who climbs the Alps with a flag in his hand, and keeps shouting *Excelsior!* amongst the clouds and avalanches, till he gets frozen to death at the top, as such a blockhead deserves to be."

"But, papa, it is all a figure."

"Yes, but a figure ought to have some definite meaning. Mere purposeless folly can typify nothing but itself. Then you have another poet, who lays claim to dramatic power, but whose Men and Women all talk a jargon which requires a special key to interpret. His works are the hardest reading I ever attempted—much harder than the statutes at large."

"And what do you think of the Laureate?" asked Reginald.

"Well, I have read some pretty ballads of his and some fine heroic lines; but heaven preserve me from the endless maundering of his elegiac

muse! You will never make me believe that healthy minds can take pleasure in a set of monotonous dirges."

"We are not always in health," replied Reginald, "and, at some time of our lives, most of us require a physician. I have no doubt of the salutary influence of the great poet in question, and I never can be too grateful for the noblest of all requiems. Nor can I agree with you in your estimate of the others. The first has written some very pleasing and tender verse; and, if I have rightly guessed the name of the second, I could show you many powerful passages in his works."

"Well, I will not quarrel with you about them. They shall be all you wish, in spite of their occasional lapses in sense and grammar. But what puts me out of patience is, when they are cried up as superior to some of the greatest names in English literature."

"Meaning Shakspeare or Milton? Surely no such claim has ever been put forward!"

"Meaning Pope, sir, who wrote such English as none of them will ever equal. There is more

real vigour in a line of the 'Dunciad' than in half a volume of their modern trash. And which of them could rival Swift in strength and clearness of expression? And for classical finish, let them give me a poem like Gray's 'Elegy;' and for grace and tenderness, let them match Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village!'"

"Papa is always going back to authors whom nobody reads now," said Charlotte.

"Which is only another proof of the execrable taste of the age," returned her father. "It is just the same with novels. Writers like Fielding and Smollett are too coarse and vulgar for our young ladies; they do not like ugly things to be called by their proper names, but they gloat over descriptions of beautiful bigamists, fascinating murderesses, and accomplished ruffians—heroines whom our ancestors would have whipped at the cart's tail, and heroes whom they would have hung at Tyburn."

"Now really," said Mrs. Strong, "I don't see that our modern novels are worse than those I remember in my youth."

"If you mean the productions of the Minerva Press, my dear, they certainly cannot be surpassed in absurdity; but, however extravagant, there was some sense of morality in them—some notion of the difference between right and wrong. The villains and reprobates were not made to engage the warmest sympathies of the reader."

"But surely you do not include all modern novels in the same category?" said Reginald.

"Of course, they are not all alike. I only speak of the prevailing taste—especially amongst our young ladies."

"Why, papa," said Emma, "some of the most fashionable novels are quite different from what you describe. They are as good as sermons, only much more amusing. And you may have them on every side of the controversies of the day—High Church, and Low Church, and No Church, just as it suits your fancy."

"I object to sermons by unauthorized preachers, my dear, and I do not choose to take my opinions on serious subjects from silly story-books."

"And yet, in many respects," observed Reginald, "the press now performs the functions of the pulpit."

"And a pretty set of apostles it has given us!" cried the lawyer. "I should like you to see some of the authors of religious articles. You would never think of them again without recalling a strong flavour of whisky and tobacco."

"Which is better than fire and brimstone, at all events," replied Reginald, smiling.

"But what I find fault with is," continued the lawyer, "that people should talk and write about things of which they are profoundly ignorant. It is so with half our politicians, both in and out of parliament."

"Then you think there is as much quackery in politics as theology?"

"Quackery, my dear sir!—it is the age of quackery. What is the meaning, do you suppose, of all this absurd flattery of the working man? To listen to some people, you would think every virtue under heaven was monopolized by the wearers of corduroys."

"But even Dr. Goodenough speaks with enthusiasm of the virtues of the poor."

"Of course, the poor have their good qualities as well as the rich. I believe, indeed, that men and women are much the same in all classes, only differing according to their opportunities. But I object to the folly and falsehood of ascribing the highest wisdom and virtue to the class which is most ignorant, and most exposed to temptation."

"And it seems to me," said Mrs. Strong, "that there are working men and women in every class."

"As for that," said the lawyer, "I have done more work in my time than a dozen bricklayer's labourers; and fashionable ladies, my dear, work hard enough in the season. But, accepting the term in its usual sense, the working man is neither wiser nor better than his fellow-creatures, and those who tell him that he is so, are either amusing themselves at his expense, or lying for some base purpose of their own."

"A good deal of such talk," observed Reginald, "is probably mere conventional *cant*. We are accustomed to that sort of thing in America."

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear sir. There is the cant political, as well as the cant religious, and every party has its favourite gabble. But this idiotic worship of the mob appears to me the vilest and stupidest of all."

"We must admit, however," said Reginald, "that there is a semblance of generosity in taking the side of the poor against the rich, and that this has a great charm for many minds, especially the young and ardent."

"And where the democratic passion is sincere," answered the lawyer, "I look on it as an illusion of youth, which will be cured by experience. Nay, it may ultimately sober down to a real and wise interest in the people's welfare. I like, too, the independence of a poor man who stands up sturdily for his order, even if he exaggerates a little. But what shall we say to some young nobleman, who, if he had not been the son of a lord, might have risen by his unassisted genius to be a third clerk in my office, yet who prates about inequality of rank as a great evil, and clamours for the abolition of all social privileges? Why,

the booby has no other claim for any one to listen to him, and, if he is honest, ought to hold his tongue for ever."

"You are always very severe on young men, papa," said Charlotte. "I wonder what they were like in your time!"

"I can tell you what they were *not* like, if that will please you. They were not like great school-girls, with hair smoothly parted on their foreheads; and they did not drawl like idiots, nor lisp like babies. They spoke the English language, not a mixture of slang and gibberish. They were not *awfully* glad, and *awfully* sorry, and *awfully* hot, and *awfully* cold, and *awfully* hungry, and *awfully* bored, and *awfully* this, that, or the other, all day long. They did not call their fathers the *governor*, talk of their friends as their *pals*, or describe a young lady as a *jolly brick;* and they did not interrupt every conversation, or intrude their opinions on every company."

"But I have heard you say yourself, papa, that they went to prize-fights, and drank too much wine after dinner."

"Well, some of them did so; but, at all events, they were not milksops; and they did not smoke themselves into mummies before they had a beard to their chins. They were generally fine, manly fellows, with healthy complexions and simple manners."

"Of course, we all judge by comparison," said Reginald, "but nothing has struck me more, since I came to England, than the number of fine youths I have seen, and their manly bearing."

"Well, I hope the breed is not quite extinct; and, on the whole, the decline I lament is rather in brains than sinews. Leaving out the wretched boys who poison themselves prematurely with tobacco, we could still make a tolerable show of sturdy fellows. Only, I fear they would be found weakest about the head."

"Now really, my dear," said Mrs. Strong, laughing, "I think you have sufficiently libelled our poor old country. I trust, Mr. Vaughan, you will not believe him to be in earnest."

"There you have another instance of our

modern English manners and customs—a wife seeking to impeach her husband's veracity. But never mind, my dear; I dare say Mr. Vaughan, has seen strong-minded women in America!"

"And amiable women too—but none more amiable than in England," answered Reginald, gallantly.

"After that polite speech," returned Mrs. Strong, rising, "I think we may safely leave our defence in your hands. When you join us in the drawing-room, I hope you will have converted Mr. Strong to better sentiments."

"Do you think he will say the same pretty things behind your backs, as before your faces?" inquired the lawyer. "But you ladies are so innocent!"

The mother and daughters did not attempt any further parley, and the gentlemen were left to their wine.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAMILY HISTORY.

"TRY this bottle of port, Mr. Vaughan."

"With your permission, I will keep to the claret."

"O the degeneracy of the age! I never meet with a young man now who knows what a glass of good wine is. The potations have grown as thin as the wit and the poetry."

"If the latter are as good of their kind as this claret, they are certainly not to be despised."

"Well, every one to his taste. But now let me hear a little of your plans. You are thinking of going to the bar?"

"Such is my intention."

"Will you excuse my asking, if you merely

want a nominal profession, or if you mean to work and earn money?"

"To work, of course, and to earn money, if possible. I have been a soldier, Mr. Strong, but my wars are over; the misfortunes of my country have left me but slenderly provided with cash, and I have to make my own way in the world."

"I do not wish to discourage you, but you must not be too sanguine. The bar is a very pretty position for a young gentleman who likes a quiet set of chambers, where he can take his ease, and smoke his cigars, and give his wine-parties; and who goes upon circuit to make pleasant bachelor acquaintances, till he feels inclined to marry, or get into parliament. But it is hard, up-hill work for the man who means to live by it. There is first the necessary preparation, and then years may elapse before he fingers a brief."

"But you do not think the difficulties unconquerable?"

"Nothing is unconquerable by patience, energy, and resolution. All I say is, that you may be very long in attaining to a bare subsistence. It

is true that many young barristers help themselves through by other means beside their profession. They have recourse to the press, and reporting, and all kinds of literary handicraft."

"You see no objection to these?"

"None, if they are honestly pursued. In fact the more mechanical portion of such work amounts simply to a fair day's labour for a fair day's pay, and may rank with casting accounts, or weaving calico. But, when it comes to any sort of original writing, a poor man may often be tempted to sell his conscience for hire. If I had a son who fancied himself endowed with some literary talent, great or small, I would rather see him earn his living as a copying clerk, and keep his mind free, than prostitute his pen to the service of any sect, or faction, or private interest, or popular humbug. It is never worth while to do dirty work."

"But surely the profession of letters may be followed in a noble spirit?"

"Yes; but it is more likely to be so when the

author does not depend on it for his daily bread. That was sound advice which Walter Scott once gave to a young writer, to make literature his staff, but never his crutch."

"No doubt, every art and science may be degraded, if one comes to look at it *merely* as a source of profit. But is not the same thing true of every pursuit in life?"

"Even law?" said the solicitor, smiling grimly.

"Yes, even law; for, though we may look out for fees, there is no reason why we should forget all its grander associations. The defence of right, the protection of innocence, the security of nations, the earthly image of the eternal justice, is certainly no vulgar or ignoble thing."

"You shall be the poet laureate of the Inns of Court," said the solicitor, with the same grim smile, but with a kindly twinkle in his eye at the young man's enthusiasm. "For my own part, without soaring to those transcendental heights, I must needs confess that law has in it a strong human interest, when we regard it as affecting the course of many lives. In my branch of the

profession, for instance, one becomes acquainted with strange histories."

"I have often thought," said Reginald, "how many romances lie buried amongst the dusty papers in a lawyer's office. But talking of that, you must know a great deal about a subject which has lately occupied my fancy, and which has a kind of fascination for me—I mean the family history of the Vaughans of Aldersleigh."

"For three generations, I know as much about it as any one. My father and grandfather were the family lawyers before me. That carries one back to the time of swords and periwigs."

"I should esteem it a great favour if you would give me a brief sketch of the story—that is, if I am asking nothing unwarrantable, and there are no family secrets to conceal."

"Nothing that can affect any one now," said the lawyer, with a sigh. "The whole race has dwindled down to one solitary representative, and will soon, I fear, be extinct. Help yourself to some more claret—since you *will* keep to that

meagre beverage—and I will tell you what I know of the matter."

Reginald filled his glass, to satisfy his host's notions of hospitality, and the lawyer proceeded as follows:—

"I will begin with old Gerald Vaughan, the grandfather of the present Squire. He was born about 1730, and his younger days were spent in the midst of Jacobite conspiracies. The Vaughans had retired from London and the court, but were supposed to continue their relations with the Pretender, and were several times involved in suspected plots, which cost them both money and land to get over. The cause was lost, however, and they had to submit to destiny and George III. Gerald, who was one of the proudest and stiffest of the line, was twice married; first, to an English girl, a baronet's daughter, who died in giving birth to Henry, the Squire's father; and secondly, to a French lady, a descendant of the great house of Montmorency. Then followed the drama which has been acted so often since the days of Jacob and Esau. Gerald had a son by his second wife,

named Edward, and all the mother's affection was centred in this boy. She did everything in her power to wean the love of the father from the elder son, and to push the fortunes of the younger at the expense of his brother. Of course, the young gentleman was miserably spoiled. While Henry was sent to make his way as he could at school and college, with very little notice or encouragement from his parents, Edward was educated at home under easy and compliant tutors. Every wish was granted, every fancy gratified, and the natural results followed. I have heard my grandfather say that both were fine, high-spirited lads, but that Edward grew up intolerably self-willed and self-indulgent. When scarcely arrived at manhood, he plunged into every kind of dissipation, and was soon in danger of being overwhelmed by pecuniary difficulties. Time after time, his mother interceded, and his father paid his debts for him, but it was all of no avail. His extravagance continued, till he gradually became entangled in doubtful and discreditable transactions. Then Gerald's pride took the

alarm, and he threatened to see him no more. Again the mother pleaded, and again the father relented, and the prodigal returned to Aldersleigh—but it was for the last time. A month after, he ran away with an opera-dancer."

"When did all this happen?" asked Reginald.

"About the close of the American war," answered the lawyer. "Henry, who had entered the army, was then abroad with his regiment, and did not hear of his brother's fate till long afterwards. The latter never saw his family again, but led a wandering life, partly on the Continent, partly in various English watering-places, till, worn out by excesses, he died prematurely in obscure lodgings in London, soon after the breaking out of the French Revolution. His poor, foolish mother did not long survive him, and his father, who had settled down into a stern, morose old man, would never allow his name to be mentioned in his presence."

"What became of the companion of his flight?"

"That was never known. Henry, who had a kind heart, and cherished some affection for his

brother, in spite of all he had suffered on his account, was unable to find any traces of her, although he took pains to inquire. No doubt she sank lower and lower, till she was buried in some nameless grave, like many a frail woman before and since."

"Then Edward Vaughan left no children?"

"None that I know of; but, in any case, they would have been illegitimate. Since the events I have just narrated, an evil fortune seems to have rested on the house. Henry married about the time of Edward's death; but with the exception of Richard, the present Squire, who was born in 1790, he lost all his children in their infancy. And the fate of the next generation was still more lamentable. The Squire, whom you have seen as a mere wreck, was a gallant gentleman in his youth, and his wife was a beautiful woman, to whom he was fondly attached. But she withered away before her time, and, one by one, *all* the children followed—as fine a family as ever stood upon English ground. A superstitious person might look on it as a kind of doom."

"It is indeed a very sad story," said Reginald; "and, strangely enough, the same fate has befallen the family in America, though from different causes. I have no kinsman left that I know of—certainly no near kinsman—in the land of my birth."

He sighed as he spoke, and the grim face of the lawyer relaxed with a species of sympathy. "But we must not get sentimental over our wine," said Mr. Strong.

"I do not often give way to regrets," answered Reginald; "and I feel that my troubles are as nothing compared to the poor Squire's. I have youth, and health, and hope."

"You are right, my dear sir," returned the lawyer. "There are few things which may not be accomplished with the help of those three. As for the Squire, he does not even know what will become of the land when he is gone."

"Has he no power to dispose of it?"

"Certainly. The entail was cut off long ago, and it belongs to him absolutely. But no argument or persuasion has hitherto prevailed on him

to make his will. I suppose he would rather trust to the chance that some heir of the old line may turn up unexpectedly, than leave the property to a stranger."

"It is not altogether unnatural," said Reginald.

"Perhaps not; but it is very unwise. We should never leave to chance what may be provided for by a reasonable choice. However, the Squire will not listen to common sense on the subject."

"After all he has lost," said Reginald, "what becomes of the land can only be a secondary interest. I can quite understand his feelings."

Just then the door opened, and a young man of a pleasant aspect, but somewhat languid in his movements, strolled leisurely into the room, and offered his hand to the lawyer.

"Why, George? is it you? My nephew, Mr. Vaughan; one of the young gentlemen I told you of, who fancy they are studying for the bar."

"Yes, uncle, it is I—come for a little recreation after the labours of the day."

"Worn out with work—reading the last new novel, I suppose. Well, stretch your legs under the mahogany, and take some wine."

"Thank you, I have just been dining at the club."

"I thought you had not come direct from chambers. And how many games of billiards did you play before dinner?"

"Now, uncle, I object to the inquisition: it is not an English institution. I am sure, sir," he added, turning to Reginald, "you will agree with me in that sentiment."

"It appeals to the freemasonry of young men all the world over. Yet some of us, who have had enough of independence, would be glad of a kind inquisitor, to take a little interest in our affairs."

"I don't see that exactly. Fathers, uncles, and guardians are worthy of all respect and gratitude, so long as they confine themselves to supplying our wants. But they should not be too curious. It is going beyond their proper sphere, and giving themselves unnecessary trouble."

"The chief fault of the old dogs is," growled the lawyer, "that they have forgotten how to keep young puppies in order. But if you can be of use for once in your life, Master George, you will perhaps put this gentleman in the way of joining your profession. He is an American, and has been a soldier, and he wants to study the law—not to play at it, mind—and he will require to get chambers, and enter one of the Inns of Court."

"I will do what I can with pleasure," said the young man, good-naturedly. "I have been wishing for some one to join me in chambers; and if my uncle has not given me too bad a character we might arrange to live together, at least for the present."

"Live with you!" cried the lawyer, with an appearance of contemptuous pity, but really gratified at his nephew's proposal; "your laziness would prove infectious, and ruin any one within reach of the contagion."

"I would brave that danger," said Reginald, "and feel truly grateful for so kind an offer.

My fear is, that you might find me too dull a companion."

"Liberty is my maxim," answered the young Templar. "You might work or play as you liked, so long as you left me to do the same. But, seriously, I am a bit of a physiognomist, and I think we should get on very well together."

"Then, with your leave, I will call on you to-morrow, and we can talk over the matter at leisure."

"Come to breakfast," said George. "At eleven," he added, in a whisper; "but, to please my uncle, we will suppose it to be half-past eight."

More conversation followed, in the same half-bantering tone, and then the gentlemen repaired to the drawing-room, where "Cousin George" was saluted with a volley of reproaches by the ladies. He had broken his engagements, forgotten to execute commissions, and proved himself totally undeserving of the confidence of his female relations.

"Now really, my dear aunt and cousins," he responded, with perfect coolness, "you should

remember that the pleasures of life must sometimes be sacrificed to its duties. Professional pursuits, you know——"

"Yes, we know all about it, George," said Miss Charlotte, with a little toss of the head. "You were too busy to take us to Richmond, as you promised, but you found time the same day to go to a bachelor dinner at Greenwich."

"Some one has been slandering me to my nearest and dearest friends. It is the fate of merit in this world to provoke envy, and I cannot hope to escape the common lot of humanity. If you would be at peace, Mr. Vaughan, let me advise you not to distinguish yourself above your fellows."

"If he imitates your example he will be quite safe on that score," said the lawyer.

"Pardon me, my dear uncle; there are different modes of distinction. There is the man who rushes through life like an express train, puffing, and blowing, and tearing down everything in his way, and who certainly does contrive to make some noise in the world. But then there is

also the philosophic mind, which indulges in the calm delights of contemplation."

"And there is the tongue, which talks nonsense as long as any one will listen to it," interrupted Mr. Strong. "Come, girls, give us some music; and, after tea, we may manage to get up a game at whist. I suppose you can play a rubber, Mr. Vaughan?"

"I am bound to own that I know very little about it."

"Well, that is the way with all the new generation. They can neither drink wine nor play at whist."

"And a very good thing too, my dear," said Mrs. Strong. "I remember when people used to sit a great deal too long after dinner, and then quarrel over their cards, and make themselves disagreeable."

"Which they never do now, of course," said the lawyer.

But by this time the young ladies were seated at the piano, and "Cousin George" condescended to turn over the leaves of the music for them.

They performed some long and difficult pieces, which Reginald could not help contrasting with Mary Goodenough's sweet and simple airs; and so the evening wore away, and the visit came to an end.

CHAPTER XII.

BETHNAL GREEN.

A FEW days later, when Reginald was already settled in chambers in the Temple, he determined to deliver his letter of introduction to Mr. Crosby. Accordingly, he set out one morning for that north-eastern extremity of London, which was at present utterly unknown to him. Passing through the crowded streets of the City, with all its rush of busy and restless life, he entered on a district which seemed to have a peculiar character of its own. There was still the stir of a numerous population, but poorer and ruder than in the places he had just traversed, and the streets themselves wore a meaner and gloomier aspect. Many of the houses showed signs of neglect and decay,

and the shops were generally small and sordidly furnished. Some old fashions appeared to linger in that region, for the Highlander still stood sentry at the door of the tobacconist, the party-coloured pole projected from the barber's window, and black dolls were suspended over the portals of dealers in rags, bones, and bottles. But no air of venerable antiquity redeemed the ugliness of the monotonous brick buildings, whose only distinctive feature was, here and there, a glass front to the garrets where, in former days, the French emigrants had worked at their looms, and repaid the hospitality of England by establishing the silk-trade of Spitalfields.

As Reginald walked along, he remarked some of the old French names over shops and doorways, but the stores and notices displayed in the windows were generally suggestive of more modern times. There was that marvellous stock of cheap literature which now floods the town with a deluge of loose, vague, contradictory opinions—wild, indescribable, chaotic — and feeds the fancy of errand-boys and sempstresses with tales of daring robbers and

dissolute noblemen, more extraordinary than the Arabian Nights, and less probable than the adventures of Baron Munchausen. There were the illustrated journals of the coarser kind, and song-books adorned with barbarous specimens of wood-engraving. There, too, were countless photographs, hideous in their exaggerated resemblance to humanity. And there were huge, flaunting bills, printed in red and blue letters, inviting subscriptions to building societies or announcing excursions to Epping Forest.

Advancing further, and inquiring his way to the church he wished to find, Reginald was directed to take some of the smaller streets, and was soon involved in a labyrinth of narrow thoroughfares, where ragged, barefooted children played in the gutters, and slovenly, dishevelled women screamed at them in shrill voices from the upper casements. Few other sounds were heard, save the harsh cries of the itinerant vendors of fish and vegetables, or the noise of a drunken quarrel from some blind alley. Lean, poverty-stricken figures moved listlessly about with heavy and slouching

gait; occasional groups of young vagrants lay tossing for halfpence on the pavement; and, here and there, men of savage and sinister mien loitered sullenly in corners, as though waiting for some evil chance.

It was not a cheerful prospect, and Reginald was touched with pity for the people condemned to dwell amid such dreary scenes. Had he known them better, he would probably have found that their lot, too, had its alleviations, and was not so dark and sad as he imagined. But, coming thus suddenly amongst them, he felt oppressed by that sense of gloom, which often seizes on the stranger at sight of the poorer districts of a great city.

He made his way at length to a more open space, where stood a church, the emblem of civilization in the desert, and a neat, modest house, the residence of the clergyman. He sent in Dr. Goodenough's letter, and was at once admitted to Mr. Crosby's study.

He was received by a pale, thin, careworn man, who had retained through years of trouble and many privations the air of a scholar and a gentle-

man. He seemed pleased to have tidings of his old friend, and to welcome any one in whom that friend took interest.

"When I was young," he said, "the sight of Frank Goodenough used to be like sunshine to me, and his very name still has power to call up happy recollections. I have visited him once or twice in his rustic paradise, and he has been to see me in town, but we have not met often of late. Is he still full of life and vigour?"

"As much so, I should think, as ever," answered Reginald. "He shows no sign of age."

"His lines are fallen in pleasant places; but I fancy he would have been much the same under any circumstances. He tells me you have not been long in England, so I suppose you are quite a stranger in this neighbourhood?"

"I have never been here before."

"It is not a very lively spot, and would perhaps grow wearisome, if one had not one's work to do. But you cannot imagine what a task lies before a minister of the gospel in these parts. It is a constant and desperate fight with misery, igno-

rance, and heathenism, and it is perhaps not astonishing that one's courage fails at times."

"It would be more astonishing were it otherwise."

"Well, we are but unprofitable servants, at best. Yet there is a great charm too in missionary enterprise, and its excitement may be found in Bethnal Green as truly as in Africa. I could show you many a savage tribe within a mile of this house."

"I should much like to see something of the poor of London."

"You can easily do so, if you choose to accompany me in some of my rounds. Poverty is indeed our chief spectacle here. We have no museums, no galleries of art, no relics of ancient times, but we have some strange specimens of human nature, and some startling pictures of life."

"It must be a sad spectacle, however instructive."

"Like most things in this world, it has its bright and its dark side. But if you will take luncheon with us, Mr. Vaughan, I am going after-

wards to visit some of my flock, and I shall be glad of your company."

Reginald accepted the invitation, and in a short time they were summoned to another apartment, where a frugal meal was spread, evidently the dinner of the family. A middle-aged woman, with a somewhat pinched and peevish expression of countenance, and two or three sickly-looking children, probably suffering for want of fresh air and exercise, were assembled round the table, and were introduced in succession to the unexpected guest.

"I did not know you had any one with you, Mr. Crosby," said the lady. "I am afraid we have only indifferent fare to offer."

"Mr. Vaughan will excuse all deficiencies, my dear," answered the clergyman.

"I should indeed be sorry," said Reginald, "if I put you to the least trouble or inconvenience; but I could not refuse Mr. Crosby's kind hospitality, and I hope you will allow me to join you without ceremony."

There was something in Reginald's manner

which always made a favourable impression on strangers, especially women, and the lady of the house was at once mollified by it. She bade him take a seat beside her, and helped him to a slice of the cold mutton without further comment.

"I presume, Mrs. Crosby," he continued, "from what my friend Dr. Goodenough has told me, that I only see a portion of your family."

"We have eight children," answered the lady; "but some of them are absent from home."

"Two of our girls are governesses," said the clergyman, "and three of the boys have situations in the City. We have been blessed with dutiful children, who do what they can to help their parents. I should have liked," he added, with a sigh, "to have sent one of my sons to the university, but I have never been able to do so. However, we ought to be very grateful for the good we have enjoyed."

"I do not complain," said his wife, almost reproachfully; "but I cannot help seeing how other people have got on in the world. The mother of

a family, Mr. Vaughan, has many cares that nobody else can understand."

"There are troubles in every state of life," said Mr. Crosby, "and, after all, there is only *one* thing of real importance. In my younger days, I had my hopes and wishes like other men, but I trust they have been replaced by something better."

"That is all very true, and very right, no doubt," responded the lady; "but I have always thought that I should be much more fit for my religious duties if I were more at ease on other accounts. Domestic annoyances, Mr. Vaughan, are very apt to distract the mind, I assure you."

Reginald felt rather embarrassed at this conversation, and tried to change the subject, by addressing some remarks to the children. But they were shy and awkward, and only answered in monosyllables.

"You must excuse them, poor things!" said the mother. "They have had no advantages!"

The clergyman looked pained at his wife's observations, and Reginald, anxious to relieve him,

plunged boldly into subjects of general interest. He succeeded for a time, but the lady always came back to her favourite theme.

"Yes, Mr. Vaughan; London is a very busy place, as you say; and there is a good deal of gaiety at the West End in the season. It is all very well for rich people, and people who can enjoy it. But poor folks like us have quite enough to do at home."

Or: "Travelling must be very delightful, and very improving to the mind. But how can a large family, with limited means and no prospects, ever hope to profit by it? We must give up all idea of any such pleasure!"

Or: "Books? Oh, yes! there are new books in plenty. But then, you see, we cannot afford to buy them; and really subscribing to a library is so expensive that, with all the necessaries of life at their present extravagant price, and so many mouths to feed, we should not feel justified in the indulgence of mere intellectual luxury!"

And with these, and other speeches of a like cheerful character, Mrs. Crosby continued to

entertain her guest, till the repast was finished, and the clergyman, who had sat silent and mortified, rose wearily from the table, apologized for being obliged to depart on his round of visits, and invited Reginald to accompany him.

"You are surely not going to take Mr. Vaughan into any of those horrid dens?" cried Mrs. Crosby. "It is bad enough for us to be surrounded by the haunts of misery, and to be exposed to fevers, and all kinds of dreadful diseases, without leading strangers into the same troubles."

"I think, my dear," said the clergyman, "that we have hitherto been mercifully protected from disease; and, as for Mr. Vaughan, it was his own wish to see something of our district."

"I assure you, I have a great curiosity to do so."

"Ah! I suppose it will be a novelty to you, and a contrast to your usual mode of life. But if you were in the midst of it, from year's end to year's end, as we are, you would think very differently."

"Probably, my dear madam; but, as yet, I

have had no such experience. The sorrows I have witnessed belonged to the calamities of war, not to the ordinary sufferings of poverty."

"Ah, yes!" said the clergyman, as they proceeded on their way together; "you have been a soldier, Mr. Vaughan, and have seen war. Am I right in the conjecture, that a man's chief trial is not his own hardships and perils, but his anxiety for those he loves?"

"No doubt," answered Reginald, "the latter consideration weighs heavily on many a soldier's mind, especially in that worst of contests, a civil war. But the thought of home also inspires some of his most heroic actions."

"I have been a soldier in my humble fashion," said the clergyman, smiling, "and I confess, to my shame, that the thought of wife and children has been a clog, rather than a help to me, in my spiritual warfare."

"You are no advocate for the celibacy of the clergy, Mr. Crosby?"

"Heaven forbid! I hold it to be both anti-social and anti-scriptural. I only say that a man

without family ties may sometimes feel himself more fitted for arduous undertakings."

It occurred to Reginald that a woman like Mrs. Crosby was not exactly the person to inspire lofty resolutions, and he did not attempt to dispute her husband's position. They walked on for a time in silence, and then the conversation returned to the place and its inhabitants. On these subjects the clergyman had much to impart, and Reginald listened with interest to his narratives, as they went from house to house, through narrow alleys and dismal courts.

The people received them in many different ways —some with affected obsequiousness, some with sulky civility, and some few with deliberate rudeness —but, on the whole, the parson seemed to be known and liked, and met with tokens of respect from quarters where it might have been least looked for. It is true that he addressed every one with the same friendly politeness, and entered the poorest dwelling, hat in hand, with as much deference as if it had been the palace of his sovereign.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Crosby. Take care not to break your shins over the pail, and let me dust the chair for you to sit down in it."

"I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Brown, but pray do not disturb yourself. I have only called to inquire after the children."

"Bless you, sir, all laid up with the measles, and poor John out of work these six weeks. But thank goodness, I've had my health, and my strength, and one or two little jobs to keep things going; and the neighbours has been very kind; and our Polly, that's out in service, brings me lots of scraps from her missus, that keeps a boiled-beef shop in Whitechapel; and the baker round the corner gives me credit, and the doctor sends me his stuff for nothing."

"Well, Mrs. Brown, they all know you are honest, and I am sure you are very patient and contented. I hope the children are getting better."

"Bless you, sir, it come out beautiful, and they've all been as red as lobsters. If I can but keep 'em from catching cold, they'll soon be as nice as ninepence; but I'll not send 'em back

to school till I know they can't give it to others."

"I wish every one were as thoughtful as you are, Mrs. Brown. I knew there was something the matter, when I did not see you at church."

"Well, Mr. Crosby, how can I go there when my hands are so full at home? Besides, to say truth, I've had to pawn my only decent gown."

"Never mind that, as soon as you are able to come. The Lord of that house is no respecter of persons, and will not ask if you wear an old gown or a new one. Meanwhile, say your prayers when you can, and they will be heard in this room as surely as in any other place."

"I hope so, Mr. Crosby; but I miss the preaching sadly."

"I sometimes think you could preach to me, Mrs. Brown."

"Get along with you," cried the good woman, as though amused at the absurdity of the suggestion. "But you *are* such a one for joking."

Now this was certainly not Mr. Crosby's

characteristic. He was a grave and shy man, never less inclined to jesting than at present, and his remark had been made in all seriousness. He did not attempt, however, to argue the matter, and after some further conversation took a kindly leave of his poor parishioner.

"It almost reconciles one to the foolishness of preaching," he said to Reginald, "when one finds that a good woman like this derives pleasure and profit from it. My sermons are often wearisome work, and I dare say fall coldly enough on the ears of my congregation; but I console myself with the thought that here and there a word may be spoken in season, and may reach the heart of some humble listener."

Their next visit was less satisfactory. They entered a room where the misery was evidently the result of misconduct rather than misfortune. There were signs of worse poverty than at Mrs. Brown's, but there were also tokens of waste, neglect, and intemperance. The place was almost destitute of furniture, and wretched children were huddled together in filthy corners;

but the father and mother seemed half-stupefied with drink, and there was a strong smell of spirits in the chamber.

"Here's parson come to see us," said the woman, with a cunning leer at her husband.

"Ha!" said the man; "very much afflicted—in great distress—nothing to eat—no work——"

"I am sorry to find the children looking so poorly," responded Mr. Crosby, "and I fear they have not sufficient food. If you can really get no work, would it not be better to go into the Union for their sakes?"

"Not if I knows it," growled the man. "Rather go to gaol any day. Better fed and better treated *in quod*. But you might speak to the board, master, and let 'em give us something more out of the house."

"If I speak to the board," returned the clergyman, firmly, "I must tell the truth to the best of my knowledge, and I cannot say that you make the most of what you have already. There should be no *gin* where the children are wanting bread."

"Only for physic!" said the woman, in a canting, hypocritical tone.

"Physic be hanged!" muttered the man. "I don't want spies about my place, and I won't have 'em. I shall drink what I like."

"I have no pretence to interfere with you," replied the clergyman, "except when you ask my advice or assistance. But when you do so, I have a sacred duty to perform."

"Oh gammon! you're paid for it."

"Most of us are paid for our work, sooner or later," answered the clergyman, mildly; "and the Master I serve is just in all His dealings. The great question is, whether we have earned our wages."

"I don't want no preaching."

"Well, my friend, I will not intrude on you longer; but remember, I shall be glad to help you if I can. As it is, if you like to get the children washed, and send them to school, I may manage to find them a meal now and then. At all events, they will be out of your way."

"No soap," whined the mother. "If I had but a little money to buy soap!"

"Water is to be had for nothing. However, you must do as you please."

"I tell you what, Sal," said the man; "you're a lazy hussy, and no good to nobody. Parson means well by the children, and you shall wash 'em, and send 'em to him, or I'll know the reason why."

And so, with many strange glimpses of that foul stream of life which creeps obscurely through the dark places of our civilization, Mr. Crosby and Reginald proceeded on their mission of mercy. The former had words of counsel and comfort for all, while the latter often had recourse to his purse at sight of some more than common misery, which he felt irresistibly impelled to relieve. In one dreary ruinous house, which seemed ready to tumble down at the next puff of wind, they had visited several families on the lower floors, and were about to take their departure, when a woman asked them to go up to the garret.

"There's a poor chap there," she said, "who's mortal bad, and got no friends. He's been there

for weeks, and paid for all he wanted as long as he had *the browns;* but he's run dry now, and will soon be off the hooks, to my thinking."

In compliance with this invitation they mounted to an upper chamber, where, stretched on a torn mattress of the most wretched description, lay the tall and well-proportioned figure of a man still in the prime of life, who had evidently been possessed of herculean strength, but who was now wasted by disease, and reduced to the last extremity of weakness. His matted hair and unshaven chin added to the grim expression of his pale and hollow countenance; but, as he looked up at the entrance of the strangers, there was a gleam of intelligence in his mild, blue eye, and something like a smile played about his wan lips and sunken cheeks.

The visitors approached him with an air of interest and sympathy, and the clergyman began by inquiring kindly as to the nature of his illness.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK ROUGH.

"I'M just done up, gentlemen," said the sick man, faintly; "knocked out of time, and dead beat. I never shirked a day's work in my life, and always thought I should be able to pay my way. But this fever's fairly took it out of me. I shall never do a day's work again."

"That is as God pleases," answered the clergyman, "and we never ought to despair. But surely you would have more comforts in the hospital than here?"

"Well, master," said the invalid, "I never did go to parish or hospital, and I always meant to keep myself. When I was first down with the fever, I'd money in my pocket, and thought I should soon be better. But it's all over now."

"Tell me," said Reginald, kindly; "had you been sleeping on the wet ground, or working in damp places?"

"I'd been about railway-cuttings, master, and often up to my knees in water; but I'm used to that."

"I have seen something of low fever," continued Reginald, "and know a little both of the symptoms and treatment. Will you let me feel your pulse?"

"It's no good," replied the man; but he looked gratefully at the young stranger, and offered the gaunt, sinewy arm to his fingers.

"You want stimulants—bark, wine, brandy. Have you had no advice or medicine?"

"The neighbours sent for the parish doctor, and I've had physic from the dispensary. But it's all of no use."

Here the patient's voice failed him, and he seemed to be almost fainting. Reginald made a sign to Mr. Crosby, and hastily left the room. He returned in a few minutes with various stimulants, which he administered carefully and tenderly to

the sick man. He was still engaged in this task, when another person appeared on the scene. It was the parish doctor.

"Your patient is sinking for want of sustenance," said Reginald, somewhat sternly.

"I fear so, sir," answered the doctor, not without dignity; "but, if you had my experience in such matters, you would know how impossible it is to do all we wish. Mr. Crosby will tell you the same."

"I beg your pardon," said Reginald; "I have no right to find fault. But can nothing more be done?"

"I assure you, I have given more time than I could well spare to this case," replied the doctor. "It is sad to see a fine young man cut off prematurely. But it happens every day, and we have little power to prevent it."

"I can only pray for you, my poor fellow," said the parson. "You seem to me very ill, and I hope you are prepared for any change."

"We must take things as they come, master. I was never chicken-hearted."

"But I hope you have repented of all your sins, and learned to trust in the only name that can save you, whether you live or die."

"Well, master," said the invalid, speaking slowly and with difficulty, "I am no scholar; but I've heard tell, that the Lord was once a poor working man like I am, and I don't suppose He'll be too hard upon us."

"He will be merciful to all who believe His word, and follow His example," said the clergyman.

"And to many who don't, I'm thinking," replied the sick man, "or what's to become of the poor beggars that never heard of Him?"

"There is no limit to His mercy," returned the clergyman; "but we only know that the promise was made to the faithful."

"Well, master, I can trust Him without any promises. If He means to help us, and is able to do as He pleases, that's enough for me."

"You do not exactly understand it, and yet you may have more faith than knowledge. You will not object to join me in prayer?"

Meanwhile, Reginald had taken the doctor aside, and was engaged in earnest conversation with him.

"Do you think," he said, "there is any chance of this man's recovery?"

"But little, I fear. The fever has strong hold of him. Of course, life may be prolonged by good nursing and stimulants. He should have gone to the hospital at first."

"But does not this kind of fever sometimes yield to change of air?"

"Undoubtedly. It would be his best chance, were it possible."

"Do you mean that there would be great risk in removing him?"

"There is great risk in his remaining where he is. But do you not see, my dear sir, that it would be mere mockery for me to recommend a step which is quite beyond his power to take? In dealing with the poor, we must consider not only what is best for them, but what is within their reach."

"Then, if he were a rich man, you would counsel his immediate removal from this place."

"Yes, I would send him to high ground and pure, bracing air. Of course I could not answer for the success of the experiment."

"It shall be tried, however," said Reginald. "I feel an interest in this poor fellow, and will provide the means. Do you know of some good woman who will attend to his wants, till I can find a fitting place for him?"

The doctor looked surprised, but readily promised to procure a nurse. Then Reginald handed him some money, and, begging him to furnish what was necessary in the mean time, inquired if he would oblige him by meeting him again tomorrow.

"I will make a point of doing so, though I have scarcely a moment to call my own. You may be sure I shall take a *scientific* interest in the result of your endeavours."

The doctor smiled as he said this, but he evidently regarded Reginald with sincere respect. He was too much accustomed to scenes of suffering, and too constantly busy, to show many outward signs of feeling in his intercourse with his

patients; but he was a humane man, who worked hard for little pay, and did good service to the poor with the quiet devotion of his noble profession. He was therefore not insensible to any act of kindness or generosity.

"My good friend," said Reginald, drawing near to the invalid, "I have been talking to the doctor about you, and we think that you might get better with change of air. We must send you into the country."

The eye of the patient lighted up with a sudden flash of joy, and then clouded over as suddenly. "Ah, master!" said he; "I have been longing for a gulp of fresh air, and a sight of the green fields. But I know it can't be."

"It can be, and shall be," answered Reginald, "if you will let a fellow-creature lend you a helping hand. To-morrow, I will come and fetch you."

The sick man looked up half incredulously into Reginald's face; but he saw something there which inspired him with confidence, for the bright and hopeful expression rekindled in his eye.

"I think," he said, "it would give me a chance of life. But what am I to you, master?"

"A brother man, and a brother Christian, I hope," answered Reginald.

"I told you," said the parson, "that the Lord often sends us help at need, in quite unexpected ways. Blessed be His holy name!"

"Amen!" responded the patient, feebly but heartily.

Soon after this, a nurse having been procured for the afternoon and night, Mr. Crosby and Reginald left the house together. The former expressed the pleasure he felt at the prospect of some efficient aid being rendered in the present case, and described the regret he often experienced at finding himself utterly powerless to assuage the sorrows he witnessed.

"My dear sir," said Reginald, "your ministry does much more good than mere material assistance. The latter must at all times be very limited in extent, and most of us can only select here and there a solitary instance, in which we may be of some slight service to our neighbour.'

Half an hour later, Reginald was travelling by the Loughton branch of the Great Eastern Railway, and he spent the afternoon in surveying the high ground about Woodford and Chigwell, till he succeeded in hiring a clean and airy room in a tidy cottage, where a good, motherly woman undertook to attend to the invalid. Then he returned to town, and, having taken a hasty dinner at a chop-house, reached the Temple about the close of day. There he found George Strong lying on a sofa, smoking a Turkish pipe, and sipping iced sherbet.

"I was just wishing for you, Vaughan," said that young gentleman. "I want you to show me how to brew some of your American drinks. I have never been able to get beyond a *sherry cobbler*."

"Willingly, my dear fellow," answered Reginald; "only, you must give your whole mind to the subject. Such arts are not to be treated like law. They require intense study and application."

"The same as cookery," said George. "I once tried to learn how to stew kidneys in champagne,

and I had a Frenchman for my tutor. But the result was not satisfactory."

"Well, we will give a spare hour some day to the composition of drinks. I confess I am rather tired to-night, and would rather smoke a quiet cigar."

"Where have you been, and what have you been doing all day long? You must not think me impertinent; but you are so seldom absent from your books, that the exception makes one inquisitive."

Then Reginald told him some of his Bethnal Green adventures, and George listened to the narrative with apparent interest.

"You are a strange fellow, Vaughan," said he, "and a sort of Don Quixote in your way. I do not like you the worse for it, mind, but you will not have many imitators."

"Every one to his taste, you know," answered Reginald. "I should think it a great punishment, for instance, to spend whole mornings in playing billiards."

"That's because you don't understand the game, my boy," said George.

"Possibly. It was not included in my education."

"But I say, Vaughan, will you come with me to the theatre? We shall be in time for a third act, or a ballet, or something."

"Thank you. The prospect seems rather vague, and I have a letter to write."

"Well then, after another pipe, I will leave you to your own devices, and go and call upon a friend. Do you know, Vaughan, I sometimes envy your power of finding constant employment?"

"I suppose we should all have plenty to do, if we only did it," said Reginald.

"What! study law, and that sort of thing?"

"Or whatever else comes to our hand."

"Unfortunately, nothing ever does come to my hand, you see; and I am not exactly the kind of fellow to go in search of it. I believe, after all, I am quite content to be idle."

"I do not think you will be so always. The time will come for work, as well as play."

"When it does, I shall no doubt astonish the world. Meanwhile, it gets on well enough without my assistance."

"If everybody said the same——"

"But they don't, you see, my dear fellow. There's my uncle, with work enough in him for a score of nephews. And you alone are sufficient to keep up the credit of the chambers."

"I shall have to set to work again, as soon as I have settled the little matter I told you of. I cannot afford to spend many days like this one."

"Of course not. You must maintain the honour of the establishment, and earn the respect of the attorneys for our united names. Vaughan and Strong?—very estimable young men, I assure you. One of them always to be found at his books. I suppose it must be young Strong. So like his uncle, you know."

And in this way George continued to rattle on, till, having finished his pipe, he rose suddenly from the sofa, flung his Greek smoking-cap to the other end of the room, and, nodding to his companion, strolled out into the evening air. Then Reginald sat down to write to Mary Goodenough, and related to her the story of his expedition to Bethnal Green. Mindful of his promise to the

Vicar, he abstained from any allusion to his own feelings with regard to her; but he kept her informed of all that he thought could interest her, and was repaid by pleasant descriptions of all that passed at Aldersleigh.

When he had finished his letter, he leaned out of the open window, and gazed long and wistfully at the pale streak of moonlight playing over the dark waters of the Thames. In all noisy London, there is no more quiet spot than those Temple courts at night, and here, when alone, Reginald could indulge in his love-dreams undisturbed. The future shone hopefully before him, but the hope was chastened by the sorrows which had clouded his youth, and which had left behind them a sense of the uncertainty of all human happiness. Then a prayer rose to his lips that, whatever fate might be in store for him, the troubles of life might fall lightly on the head of his chosen bride.

The next morning, Reginald was early at Bethnal Green, with a spring-cart containing a bed, and well provided with cloaks and blankets. The

doctor and parson met him, as by agreement the day before, and, with the help of some of the neighbours, the invalid was brought down from the garret, and safely laid upon the ambulatory couch. Reginald took his seat beside him, with an ample store of good things in a basket, and, having received the doctor's final directions, ordered the driver to proceed slowly on the way to Essex.

The patient spoke little during the journey. He was weak and faint, and seemed to be in a kind of dream. But he opened his eyes when they reached the skirts of what was once Epping Forest, and roused himself at the pleasant sight of trees and verdure. Reginald made him swallow a few drops of some cordial, and cheered him with kindly words of hope and encouragement.

When they arrived at the cottage, the hostess looked almost frightened at the ghastly aspect of the invalid. But Reginald had the art to smooth away difficulties and dissipate fears; and, before long, the good woman had recovered her equanimity, and was busily engaged in contrivances for the comfort of her new lodger.

Reginald remained with him for some time, and had the satisfaction of seeing him take some nourishment, and gradually fall into a slumber. Then he left him to the care of the hostess, with all necessary instructions, and returned to his usual pursuits and studies at the Temple. But the next day, and for several days after, he continued to visit his patient, and watched with intense interest the varying symptoms. The disease did not yield at once, and there were many vicissitudes in the sick man's condition; but the change of air seemed to have some influence from the first, and, after about a week, its beneficial effects became more apparent. The pulse grew calmer, the eye steadier, the dry and leathery skin recovered some of its moisture, and the broken sleep of fever was replaced by natural repose. A little later, and the amendment was no longer doubtful. The sufferer had passed through the valley of the shadow of death, and was once more on the road to life and health.

"Well, my friend," said Reginald, when one day he found him sitting up in bed, with the fresh

air blowing upon him, and the colour returning to his cheek, "I think we have weathered the storm, and are getting into smooth water."

"Ay, master," said the convalescent: "if only I was not so mortal weak. I want to be at work again, and to help myself."

"You must have patience. It will all come round in time."

"Ay, master; but I want to say something, and I don't know how. I never was a good hand at making speeches, and you've not heard much of my talk, since I've been lying here. But I've had one thing in my head all the time, and that's what you've done for me, and how I should ever thank you. It's no use, for I can't do it. But if ever the day comes when one man's life or limbs can help you in aught, please remember you've a right to 'em, and that I'm the man."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, my good fellow. I have been only too happy to render you what service I could. It was a lucky chance that made us acquainted—which reminds me, that to this moment I have never asked your name."

"My name's Rough—Jack Rough, master—and I've worked at more trades than one. I was bred in the Forest of Dean, and I've been a miner, and a lime-burner, and a navvy. I was thought uncommon strong, and never met the man that I couldn't tackle. But it's all gone out of me now."

"It will come again after a little while."

"Ay, master; but I can't lie here doing nothing. I must try and help myself somehow."

"I promise you, as soon as you are able to move, I will look out for something for you to do. But lime-kilns and railways must be given up for the present."

"And what else do you think I'm fit for, master?"

"A pair of willing hands can always find work, you know, and the world is wide enough for every man in it to earn his living. It is only going to the right place."

A few days after this conversation, Mary Goodenough wrote thus to Reginald Vaughan:

"We have been so much interested in the fate

of your sick giant. My father is most anxious to find him employment, and it happens very fortunately that your friend Morris, the bailiff, is just now in want of an extra hand for some farm-work at Aldersleigh. We think that he and the giant would suit each other exactly, and papa has spoken to him about it. He is quite ready to give the poor man a trial. Of course it would be only temporary, and not so well paid as railway-work; but we think it would not overtask his strength, and allow him time and opportunity to recover his health entirely. Besides, he would be near us, and I should have the pleasure of helping, in a small way, to complete what you have so happily begun. I have been very busy with another matter of yours. Can you guess what? I was not at all satisfied with my first attempts, and it does not please me now; but, such as it is, I send it off by to-day's post. I hope it will reach you in safety."

It was the drawing of the Lady's Oak, which arrived at the same time as this letter, and which Reginald gazed at with more pride and pleasure

than if it had been a Ruysdaal or a Waterloo. That evening he wrote in answer:

"Your tree is perfectly beautiful. I can hear the leaves rustle, and feel the coolness of the shade. I was going to scold you for not being satisfied with your first sketch, but I dare not find fault in presence of the finished work. A thousand, thousand thanks for the great joy you have given me. Whenever I look at your drawing, it will carry me back to Aldersleigh, and waken thoughts and feelings which I may not venture to describe. And now let me thank you still more, if possible, for the kind interest you have taken in poor Jack Rough. Your plan is an excellent one, and will, I hope and trust, completely restore him to health and strength. He is really a good fellow, and far too grateful for what little I have been able to do for him. In fact, I quite agree with Wordsworth:

> 'I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness still returning;
> Alas! the gratitude of men
> Hath oftener left me mourning!'

I am sure you and your father will like him, and I shall often wish myself in his place. Does not

Morris want a second labourer, and could you not recommend another of your friends for the post?"

To this Mary answered:

"I am afraid Morris would have nothing to do with you. Poetry and the fine arts are not to his taste. He has roamed all his life through the woods of Aldersleigh, and I dare say never knew where the fairies danced, or cared to listen to the nightingale. Do you know I have been reading the 'Flower and the Leaf,' and since then have seen all sorts of strange and beautiful forms amongst the trees? I am trying to make a sketch of them."

Reginald turned to his Chaucer, and the young gentlewoman, who sat in the green arbour and saw the great company of knights and ladies, had henceforth for him the face and the figure of Mary Goodenough. His fancy took flight, for a season, from his dull chambers to scenes of sylvan loveliness; but then he remembered that they who honour the Leaf can only win it by toil and trouble, and he went back to his dry law-books with redoubled energy and resolution.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS.

AFTER the last chapter, it need scarcely be added that Jack Rough took his departure in due course for Aldersleigh, and that Mary kept Reginald fully informed of his proceedings there. He met with a kind reception for his patron's sake, but his own good qualities soon began to show themselves, and, as his strength returned, he astonished every one by the amount of work he was able to get through.

"My father says," wrote Mary, "that Jack must be descended from the Titans; and Morris, who knows nothing about them, nods his head in approval, as he takes it for some sort of compliment to his new labourer. To see such a man digging

is really wonderful, for he seems to throw body and soul into his work. I sometimes fear he will make himself ill again with his exertions, but my father thinks it is natural to him to work in this manner, and that he can no more refrain from it than a poet or painter can from his art."

"I am truly glad," wrote Reginald in reply, "to hear such a good account of poor Jack Rough. I always hoped he would do me credit, but was scarcely prepared for such a description of his achievements. I have no doubt it is as your father says, and that he works with that inborn elasticity of the mind and will, which makes the peasant's labour a source of pleasure, and raises him to the level of the artist."

A few days later, Mary wrote:

"Papa has had some singular conversations with Jack Rough. He has not been used to go to church, but seems to have some religious notions of his own, picked up he can scarcely tell how or where, and papa will have it he is a better Christian than most people. You know how mild and tolerant my dear father is, and you may be sure he

would talk to him in the best and kindest way; and now Jack says that the church we all go to cannot be a bad place, and that he means to come there every Sunday. If you could see him in his Sunday clothes, which he took care to inform me were given him by the best friend he had in the world—and I thought I could guess who that friend was—you would be quite proud of his handsome looks, now that he has recovered his health. When he first came down he used to move very feebly and slowly; but now he strides along, like a young giant as he is, and papa says he shakes his invincible locks like Samson, and is ready to defy the Philistines."

This interchange of letters beguiled the hours of absence, and the autumn passed more quickly than Reginald had anticipated. Other things, besides letters, travelled occasionally between London and St. Mary's-in-the-Wold. New books, and prints, and music, and here and there a black-letter volume, bought at a sale, arrived from time to time at the Vicarage; while flowers found their way to the Temple, with fresh leaves from the

woods of Aldersleigh, and a second drawing, full of fancy and feeling, illustrative of Chaucer's poem. But, for the most part, Reginald continued to work steadily at law, and scarcely left his chambers, except for necessary exercise, or a visit now and then to the Strongs. George laughed at him, and pitied him, but on the whole left him to do as he liked; and, as the more idle man was absent from town during the long vacation, Reginald could not complain of much interference with his studies.

And so the autumn waned, and the black London fogs and shortening days announced the approach of winter. Reginald would sit over the fire in his chambers, hard at work, till his eyes grew wearied and his brain dizzy; then he would refresh himself with a sight of the greenwood shades and elfin forms in Mary's last drawing. They seemed to reproach his delay, and beckon him to Aldersleigh; and when at length Christmas really drew near, and he could fairly claim to have earned a release from labour, he sprang up from his books with the delight of a schoolboy at the same season, and lost

not another moment in preparing for his journey into Worcestershire.

There was no sign of frost, but the afternoon was cheerless and stormy, when Reginald arrived at St. Mary's-in-the-Wold. It looked very different with the wind rushing through the leafless branches of the trees, and the mists gathering over the Malvern Hills, from when he had last seen it in the glow of its summer splendour; yet the heart of the young man warmed at its aspect, and, depositing his luggage at the 'Blue Lion,' he hastened towards the Vicarage with eager and buoyant footsteps. As he passed the church, his attention was attracted by the sound of voices, and, looking in at the open door, he beheld a charming vision.

Mounted on a ladder, surrounded by her school-children, Mary was occupied in decorating the columns with wreaths of holly and clusters of bright, red berries; and the fair, young, innocent faces and fluttering garments, seen in the dim light, suggested a group of attendant spirits ministering at some sacred shrine. With a sudden blush, and a little cry of surprise, Mary dropped

the wreath from her fingers, and descended from her elevated station. In a moment more she was shaking hands with Reginald in the porch.

"How fortunate!" said he. "I am just in time to help you with your preparations. Will you let me set to work at once?"

"I shall be delighted to have your help," she answered, "and you will be able to get at some places beyond my reach. If you will mount the ladder, I will hand you up some of these garlands, and tell you where to put them."

They were soon busy at their task, and made such rapid progress that, when the deepening shades of evening at length forced them to desist, the work was pretty nearly completed. Then they walked to the Vicarage together, while the village children ran away merrily to their several homes, to tell their parents how the fine, tall gentleman had arrived from London, and come to the church to help Miss Mary in dressing it up for Christmas.

The Vicar received his young friend with open arms, and the next few days were very happy

ones beneath his hospitable roof. There was no need for much explanation, but Reginald's whole manner showed that his sentiments with regard to Mary remained unaltered, and it was hardly possible to treat him otherwise than as an accepted lover. Mrs. Graham and Miss Prior came to call at the Vicarage, and, as soon as they found themselves alone with Mary, spoke to her openly on the subject, and asked leave to congratulate her on her engagement.

"We are not engaged," said that deceitful young lady, blushing. "There is nothing settled, I assure you—and—and——"

"It may come to nothing yet, of course," said Mrs. Graham. "But, my dear Mary, it does not look much like it, and, as an old friend of your mother's, I must be excused for taking a warm interest in what so nearly concerns your welfare. I trust you have considered the matter very carefully, and that this young gentleman is in every respect worthy of you."

Then the frank nature of the girl was too strong for any bashful cunning. "If I have a doubt on

the subject," she said, "it is whether I am worthy of *him*."

"I see that we may congratulate you, my dear," resumed Mrs. Graham, with a kind, motherly smile. "Your father seems to approve, and I hope there may be no serious difficulties in the way of your happiness."

"My father is what he has always been, the best and kindest of fathers; and I do not think there are any very serious difficulties. Money, for instance, does not seem to me of much importance."

"It has been found, however, to be very useful in housekeeping," answered the elder lady. "Love is not quite sufficient, you know, to pay rent, and taxes, and butcher's bills."

"Never mind what she says, Mary," interposed Miss Prior. "Love, that is worthy of the name, will find a way to provide for what it loves. In your place, I should have no fear."

"I have none, my dear Aunt Jane; and I am sure dear Mrs. Graham does not wish me to be mean or mercenary. But she is anxious, on my

account, that I should not want for anything. Believe me, Reginald—that is, Mr. Vaughan—is only too scrupulous on that head; and will never ask me to marry until he thinks he can offer me a fitting home."

"Then it is not to be very soon?" asked Miss Prior, with a look of disappointment.

"There is really nothing settled, and I am quite content to wait. It will be some time yet, before Reginald—Mr. Vaughan, I mean—can be called to the bar."

"Ah!" said Miss Prior, with a sigh; "things often turn out in this life so contrary to expectation."

"Now what a goose you are, Jane!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham. "First, you tell Mary to have no fear; and then you fill her head with undefined doubts and anxieties. I, on the other hand, would have her think well of what are the chances before her. But, if she sees no insuperable objections, and has really made up her mind to accept this young man, let her go on cheerfully and hopefully, and not be restless or impatient because she may have to wait a little."

"You are both so kind," said Mary, taking a hand of each, "and I know that your only wish is for my happiness. But, if you would really oblige me, we will not talk much on this subject at present. It is still new and strange to me, and I want more time to think over it. When all is settled, you will be the first to be told of it."

So a treaty was made, that Mary was to be left in peace to her own thoughts and fancies; but the good ladies did not the less notice what was passing before their eyes, and continued to watch with intense interest the progress of their young friend's love-affair.

Meanwhile, Reginald had again visited Aldersleigh more than once, and been received by the Squire with as much cordiality as before. It seemed as if his presence put fresh life into the old man, and aroused a set of feelings that had long lain dormant in his bosom. Reginald was surprised and gratified at the warmth of his reception, and heard with no little astonishment, on the occasion of his second visit, that the Squire intended once more to keep Christmas at the Hall,

and that he and his friends at the Vicarage were to be invited to share in the festivities.

"It's the most wonderful thing I've heard of in my time," said the old servant William to the young American. "Since you came into the country, sir, master's a changed man; and this Christmas he's more like his old self than ever I thought to see him again. He's ordered fires in all the rooms, and the whole house to be dressed with holly, and beef and beer for all the tenants and labourers—not but what they always had it at their own homes—but this year they are to come up to the Hall, and have their sports in the kitchen just as it was in the old times. It almost frightens me to see him so gamesome-like!"

On the morning of the great festival the Squire was in his own pew at church, listening to the Christmas anthems, and to Dr. Goodenough's genial and heart-cheering discourse. The Vicar held that gloom and asceticism were quite out of character with the season, and that cheerful thoughts and beaming looks were best fitted to

hail the anniversary of that wondrous birth, from which man dates his true hopes of happiness here and hereafter. Of course, many good people would have considered him altogether wrong, and have preferred to dwell on their own sins and those of their neighbours, as the more proper and profitable occupation; but, whether from temperament or conviction, the Vicar had a strong faith in the power of joy and gratitude, as well as sorrow and remorse, to work on the human soul, and believed this to be one of the occasions when pleasant feelings are at once more natural and more devout.

As the congregation streamed out of church, many eyes were turned with a kindly and reverential interest to the tall, stooping figure of the old Squire, now less often seen amongst them than formerly, but still associated with the place in the memories of most of those there present. He returned their greetings with a familiar courtesy, and his face wore the melancholy smile, which of late years had been his nearest approach to a contented or happy look. There was something

even of warmth in his meeting with Reginald and the Vicar, and he took Mary's arm in his own with fatherly tenderness, as they walked across the churchyard to the gate where the carriage was waiting.

"You must come up at once to the Hall, my dear," he said. "I want you to preside over our preparations, and both Mrs. Sutton and William will take nobody's advice but yours."

"That's the way you carry off my daughter, Squire?" said the Vicar. "Well! the Vaughans were always a high-handed race, who did what they liked with their own and every one else's possessions!"

"Here is one of the name," answered the Squire, as he handed Mary into the carriage, "who will not grudge me this young lady's company—at least, for a short time."

Mary blushed at this speech, but Reginald only smiled and bowed. It was clear that even the Squire understood what was passing between them.

That afternoon, there was a great gathering at

Aldersleigh. The rafters of the grand old kitchen once more rang with the sounds of mirth, the tables groaned beneath the store of smoking meats, and the strong ale foamed in the antique jugs and tankards. Then there was dancing for the young, and laughing girls were kissed under the mistletoe, as their grandmothers had been in the years long gone; and old jokes were repeated and old stories told, which recalled to many a heart the merry days of youth. Once, in the midst of their sports, the Squire appeared amongst them, and strove to look jovial, as he pledged them in a brimming bowl; but the effort was painful, he could only endure it for a few moments, and, as he turned away, there was a sudden hush in the noisy revelry, and glances of respectful pity followed him as he retired from the throng. They all knew, even the rudest and most ignorant, what thoughts were pressing on his memory.

But, with his own few familiar guests, he was that day unusually calm and cheerful. He talked pleasantly with Mrs. Graham, Miss Prior,

and the Vicar, and watched the movements of the young people with something of paternal satisfaction. In the course of the evening he drew the Vicar on one side, and said to him: "I can see, my old friend, that your Mary has made a conquest."

"Yes, Squire, I have reason to believe it is so. I might have wished it otherwise, but nature is stronger than all our wishes."

"Surely you do net object to the young gentleman? He seems to me all that a father could desire. Honest, brave, clever, handsome——"

"And a Vaughan, you would add, Squire. Well, I have nothing to say against him. But I wanted to keep my little Mary all to myself, like a selfish old fellow as I am, and had rather not part with her even to a lover. Nothing is settled, however, and it can hardly be yet awhile. They are both poor, you know."

"Has our young soldier nothing of his own?"

"Not enough to keep a family, and therefore he has exchanged his arms for the toga. Now,

under the most favourable circumstances, it requires a long time to make one's way at the bar, and whatever might be my own wishes, I almost dread the delay for my dear child's sake."

"I think I understand your feelings. Long engagements are generally held to be a misfortune, yet I know not if after life can supply anything equal to that season of hope. Alas! the disenchantment comes too soon."

"All human hopes are subject to disappointment, Squire; but I hold that the happiness of a really well-chosen marriage is better even than the expectation. There are, of course, some calamities which can neither be foreseen nor guarded against."

"Yes, yes, yes!" said the elder man, impatiently; "we will not talk of that. None can tell what may be in store for any smiling pair of lovers. But I suppose the world will go on in its old way, regardless of the morrow, and getting what happiness it can out of the day that is passing over it."

"We are taught by the highest wisdom, that

sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. And surely, my dear Squire, whatever has been our experience of life—and, as far as I am concerned, my lot has been attended with many blessings—we would not wish to sadden the dreams of youth, or to anticipate sorrow for those we love."

"No, my dear friend; we would rather avert it if we could. But our power is so limited that our best endeavours must often be in vain. So you think this marriage must be delayed till Reginald has made his fortune at the bar?"

"Not till he has made his fortune, but till he sees a fair prospect of earning a livelihood."

"It may be long, very long," muttered the Squire, "and I may not live to see it. Yet I somehow think it would give me one more pleasure in this world. Speak frankly, my dear Goodenough! Can I do anything to further the views of these young people?"

"You are very kind to offer it, Squire, but I do not know how you can help them. Reginald has enough for all his expenses as a student, and you have already done him good service by intro-

ducing him to our friend Strong. He could not have a better adviser."

"That is true, very true—but I sometimes think—however, we will talk of this another time. What a handsome couple they will make!"

"It is not for me to praise my own child, you know."

"And fit for any station," continued the Squire, as if speaking to himself. "And, if they had children, the luck might change, and the old name——"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," said Mrs. Graham, "but on a Christmas evening we think it unfair that you gentlemen should desert us altogether. We want you to join us in a round game."

"I fear you must excuse me," answered the Squire. "I have forgotten all my lore of that kind."

But Mary stepped forward, with her sweet smile and winning grace of manner, and the old gentleman allowed himself to be coaxed into

compliance. For the first time for many years he took part in some ordinary evening amusement, and although his mind seemed often to wander from the cards he was pleased on the whole with his occupation. When he took leave of his guests that night, he felt that their presence had not been unwelcome to him.

As the weather was fine, and a pale young winter's moon in the sky, the party from the Vicarage preferred walking home. They encountered some merry groups in the park, still full of the excitement of the late revels, and just as they reached the village they came up with a pair whom they at once recognised as Jack Rough and Mary's little maid Susan.

"Well, Jack," said Reginald, "I hope you have enjoyed yourself at the Hall."

"Ay, master; I don't know that ever I had such a day before. Only it wouldn't do to have many of 'em, or they'd spoil a lad for work. I've been telling Susan here, that a holiday's all very well now and again; but that the real thing is to sweat hard at one's labour, and to come home

tired and hungry, to eat the bread one's earned, and to sleep sound in one's bed. You needn't toss up your chin, lass, for it's the plain truth."

"It's nothing to me, Mr. Rough, one way or the other," said Susan, bridling. "I'm much obliged to you for seeing me home, but I'll say good-night if you please, and go with my mistress."

"Well, lass, I don't want to keep you against your will. I don't think I shall sleep much myself, for somehow all this racket has made me wakeful; so I'll just go and take a walk in the park. I wish all your honours a very good-night."

"Stop a minute, Jack, and I'll come with you," said Reginald. "I'll just see Miss Mary and the Vicar to their own door, and then I shall be ready to have a smoke and a chat with you. Wait for me at the gate of the churchyard."

A little later, when some fond parting words had been spoken in the porch of the Vicarage, the two young men strolled away together, and continued in conversation for another hour or two. Different as they were in social rank, education,

ideas, manners, acquirements, there was a certain sympathy between them, based on a common goodness of heart and manliness of character. Reginald talked more freely with Rough than he would have done with most persons in his own station, and the labourer addressed the gentleman in a tone that was frank without presumption, and respectful without servility. They conversed of many things connected with their past experience and future prospects, and the night was far spent when they shook hands under the Lady's Oak, and Rough returned to the farm, and Reginald to the 'Blue Lion.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEIR AT LAW.

THE Christmas holidays were over, and Reginald had returned to town. He had left the Vicarage, more in love than ever with its fair young mistress, and with his character as a suitor for her hand now fully understood and recognised.

Since that Christmas evening at the Hall the Squire had not again spoken of the prospects of the young people, but he had treated them with marked kindness whenever the occasion offered, and had bidden Reginald farewell with evident regret at his departure. He indulged as much as before in solitary thought; but, to judge by the expression of his face, his musings were of a less mournful nature than formerly, and something of

hope for the future seemed to mingle with the deep sorrows of the past.

One morning he was seated in his accustomed chair in the library, with an open volume before him, but really absorbed in his own reflections, when he was startled by the rare sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel in front of the Hall. This was followed by a loud knocking and ringing, very unusual in that quiet place, and soon after William made his appearance, with a look of some perplexity.

"If you please, sir," said he, "there's a gentleman insists on seeing you, and won't take no denial."

"Did you tell him that my health will not allow me to receive strangers?"

"Yes, sir, I said all I could; but I never saw such a persevering gentleman. And such a carriage and horses! More like the Lord Mayor of London's than any I ever set eyes on before. And such liveries! They beat the Lord Lieutenant's all to nothing!"

"And who may this persevering gentleman

be?" asked the Squire, indignantly. "And what does he mean by intruding on my privacy?"

William handed a card to his master, who read engraved thereon—

Mr. HIGGINS, M.P.

and seemed utterly at a loss to comprehend what his visitor could possibly want with him.

"Tell this gentleman," he said, after a moment's silence, "that I have not the honour of his acquaintance, and that I must positively decline to see him. If he has any business with me, he will please to address me by letter."

The servant departed with the message, but soon returned in consternation.

"If you please, sir," he exclaimed, "the gentleman won't listen to nothing. He says he must see you on family affairs of importance. And here he is, whether you will or no."

While he spoke, a fat, florid face appeared at the door, and Mr. Higgins entered the apartment, followed by a little thin man in spectacles, with a bundle of papers in his hand. The latter threw

quick, restless glances around him as he stood bowing at a distance, but the former advanced towards the Squire with an awkward assumption of familiar ease.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Vaughan, but my business is really of the utmost importance, and concerns you in particular. I was determined you should hear it from no one but myself, and I have come over from Malvern on purpose to see you. No offence, I hope."

"But there *is* offence, sir," said the Squire, with dignity; "there is very grave offence in forcing yourself into a man's house, without his permission, and against his will. It is a wholly unwarrantable intrusion."

"Well, sir, I suppose you know who I am. A member of parliament, and a justice of the peace, and the head of one of the first firms in Liverpool —I don't see that I'm taking a liberty in calling upon any gentleman—let alone the business I come about."

"And if you were a peer of the realm, sir," said the Squire, "it would make no difference. I

decline to have my seclusion disturbed by any stranger. If you have anything to communicate, write to me, or to my man of business, and it shall have such attention as it deserves."

"Ah, but if you knew all, you wouldn't talk in that strain, Mr. Vaughan. You could hardly refuse to see one of your nearest relations, and the heir to the estate."

"What!" cried the Squire, surprise for the moment getting the better of his dignified reserve. "You must either be mad, or attempting to impose on my credulity."

"Not a bit of it, my good sir!" said Mr. Higgins, resuming his natural air of impudence. "As sure as I'm standing here, I'm your own cousin. Your uncle, Edward Vaughan, was my great-grandfather, and you and I and my children are the only living descendants of old Gerald Vaughan. I made it all out when I was stopping at Malvern last summer. At least, I got upon the track, and my lawyer there, Mr. Sharp, followed it up, and bagged the game."

"Yes, sir," said the little thin man, speaking

for the first time, "Mr. Higgins is quite accurate in his statement. We can prove his descent from Edward, son of Gerald Vaughan, Esq., of Aldersleigh. I pledge my professional reputation that no link is wanting in the chain."

"You are perhaps not aware, sir," interposed the Squire, "that my uncle Edward was never married."

"Pardon me," said the little man, selecting a paper from his bundle; "I hold in my hand a certificate of his marriage with Julia Farfallina—a young lady well known, I believe, in her day as a distinguished artist at the Opera."

"He ran away with that unfortunate girl," answered the Squire; "but, from all I have heard, he was not the man to marry her."

"Whatever may have been his motive," said Mr. Sharp, "whether remorse or pity, or the power of female blandishments (which, in the course of my professional experience, I have found with some men irresistible), there can be no doubt of the fact that he made her his wife; and that he had a daughter, born in lawful wedlock,

who was the grandmother of my esteemed friend and client, Mr. Higgins."

"I cannot believe it," returned the Squire, looking steadily at his visitors. "These things happened before I was born; but I know that my father took great pains to ascertain whether his brother had left a child or children. Had there been any such, he must have discovered them. It is altogether a wild and improbable story."

"Whether you believe it or not, old gentleman," said Mr. Higgins, in his most offensive manner, "the thing's certain all the same, and you can't alter it. Why, you ought to be precious glad to have found an heir in a man of my position. You might have had to put up with some penniless vagabond; and here you have a member of parliament come to claim relationship with you. Besides, I have money enough to turn the old place into a new one, and I shouldn't mind laying out a round sum at once on improvements. Hang the expense! I'm not a fellow to grudge a few thousands where my own comfort is concerned. We might begin with those hideous

old avenues and terraces, and make them into something elegant and modern; and as for the house, you know, if we didn't rebuild altogether, we might have an Italian front, or something in the style of the Reform Club, you see. I've travelled a good deal abroad, and am thought to have rather a fine taste in architecture, I can tell you. Then I dare say you'll be glad to hear that I think of taking the family name; only I've not yet decided whether to call myself Higgins Vaughan or Vaughan Higgins!"

In spite of the annoyance he felt, the Squire could hardly help smiling at the effrontery of his guest. He gazed at him as a traveller might gaze at some strange and grotesque animal encountered in the wilds of Africa, and listened to his rambling talk with a kind of bewildered astonishment. But he was not the less resolved to put an end to it.

"Mr. Higgins," he said, "you have been kind enough to inform me of your intentions; now please to listen to mine. At present I am still master of this house, and, while I remain so, I

will not submit to impertinent intrusion. I decline altogether to discuss these matters with you or your legal adviser. If you have really any evidence of the truth of what you have advanced, I beg to refer you to my solicitor—Mr. Strong, of Bedford Row, London. And now I must wish you good-morning. William, show these gentlemen out."

"And is that the way," shouted Mr. Higgins, "you treat a man like *me?* I'd have you to know, sir, that I'm as good a man as you, and ten times richer, and able to buy up all your beggarly acres, even if I wasn't the heir-at-law."

"Possibly," said the Squire; "but your friend there will tell you that your wealth gives you no title to remain in my house, after I have desired you to leave it."

"If you think I'm going to be bullied by you——"

"My dear Mr. Higgins," interrupted the lawyer, "it will really be better to withdraw quietly. Let me advise you, my dear sir—let me advise you, for the sake of peace. Mr. Vaughan is a little

flurried by the suddenness of the news; but when he has had time to reflect, and to communicate with his respected solicitor, I pledge my professional reputation that he will see things in quite a different light."

"Oh, bother! what do I care about his reflections?"

"Now *do* come away, my dear sir. It is useless to prolong this conversation. We very much regret having disturbed you, Mr. Vaughan, and hope you will excuse——"

"Speak for yourself!" growled Mr. Higgins.

"For self and client," said Mr. Sharp, bowing. "One day we shall understand each other better. We have the honour, Mr. Vaughan, to wish you a *very* good-morning. Pray go on, my dear sir; I could not think of preceding you. When next we meet, Mr. Vaughan, I hope you will appreciate our motives, and do justice to the sincerity of our respectful feelings towards you. Good-morning, sir. *Good*-morning."

And, with a profusion of obeisances, the lawyer managed to get his client out of the room, and out

of the house; and the latter gentleman, having solaced himself by swearing heartily at the Squire, at William, at Mr. Sharp, and then at his own coachman and footman, threw himself into his glittering carriage, and rolled off like some Indian idol, sure of finding a crowd of worshippers by the way.

When the Squire was left alone, he began to pace up and down his room with more vigour than had been his wont of late, and a flush was on his cheek that betokened unusual excitement. There was fire, too, in his eyes, and his lip curled with an expression of contempt and indignation.

"The clown!" he muttered to himself; "the ignorant, vulgar, unmannerly clown! *He* to claim alliance with our family, and to talk of what *he* will do when he succeeds to the estate. It is too absurd; and yet he spoke as if sure of the validity of his claim, and that little lawyer seemed to confirm his words. It may be altogether an impudent imposture; but if it should be true—if he have really discovered some evidence of his descent from my poor uncle—what is to be done next?

I must write to Strong immediately, and prepare him for the visit of these people. It *cannot* be true! Such a fellow as that *cannot* be descended from the Vaughans and the Montmorencys, or have in his veins some of the best blood in Christendom. Still, we must be prepared for anything. I will write to Strong at once."

He sat down to the table, and wrote more easily and quickly than for many a day past. But when the letter had been despatched he sank back exhausted in his chair, and for the rest of the day remained in a state of utter prostration. The servants roused him with difficulty to take some dinner, and when he retired to bed that night, he appeared so weak and depressed that his faithful attendant William hesitated to leave him. But he insisted that he wanted nothing but a few hours' quiet, and in fact he soon fell asleep, and arose the next morning refreshed and tranquil. Nay, the effects of the first excitement having passed away, his mind seemed to be occupied with a new interest, which tended on the whole to divert him from his habitual gloom.

After breakfast, he ordered the carriage, and drove to the Vicarage. He was eager to acquaint Dr. Goodenough with the particulars of his late adventure, and to learn his opinion of what might be expected to result from it.

"It is a strange story," said the Vicar; "but then there are so many strange things in the world that one ceases to be astonished at anything. There is nothing impossible in the supposition, that Edward Vaughan may have married this dancing-girl, and that they may have left descendants."

"But you heard my description of the fellow. You surely cannot believe that he comes of a good stock?"

"You know, my dear Squire, that you and I have often differed on that question of race. I hold with the poet:

> 'What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?
> Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.'"

"That is true, Doctor, but it does not answer my doubt. Many men have disgraced their name and lineage, and fallen low enough beneath the

character of their ancestors. But there is a difference. A gentleman, however degraded, retains something of the look and manner of a gentleman."

"Yes, Squire; but you are thinking of a man born, nurtured, and trained amid high and noble associations. No doubt there is great force in habit, and in the influence of old traditions. But I cannot help believing that, if the best blood in Europe were to run into the gutter, it would soon get sadly puddled. Your little Howard or Percy, reared in the purlieus of Shoreditch or Whitechapel, would be very much like the other denizens of those places. Then, if this Mr. Higgins should prove to be a Vaughan on one side, he is a Farfallina, and nobody knows what else, on the other. There is really nothing in the objection on the score of his appearance and manners."

"Well," said the Squire, "it may be so. I must wait to hear from Strong, to form any opinion on the subject. But of one thing I am certain: if a man have so degenerated from his

ancestors, he is not fit to inherit their house and lands. Let us talk of something more pleasant. Have you heard lately from Reginald?"

"There is one person under my roof who hears pretty regularly from him. She tells me that he is always hard at work, which I hold to be a sure sign of health in body and mind."

"I take a strange interest in that young man," said the Squire. "Had I such a son," he added, with a deep sigh, "I should care little for the ailments and weakness of declining years. I should be quite ready to go when my time came, satisfied to leave a successor more worthy of the old name than I have been. And your Mary, too, whom I have known and loved from a baby—I sometimes think I should like to see her mistress of Aldersleigh."

"My dear Squire," answered the Vicar, with quiet dignity, "my daughter has been brought up with the simple tastes fitted to her station, and I hope she may one day be the happy mistress of a good man's home. I have no other ambition for her."

"Let me indulge a little in day-dreams, my old friend. It is long since I did so, and they seem to lift a weight from my heart. Who knows what may happen yet?"

The Vicar did not reply, but looked at him in silent amazement. This man, so long buried, as it were, beneath the wrecks of his past existence, appeared now to be once more alive, and occupied with schemes for the happiness of others. He stayed some time with Dr. Goodenough, and talked to him on various matters; but in all his conversation there was a more hopeful tone than of yore, and with Mary he was not only kind, but affectionate, and even playful.

When he returned to the Hall, however, he was again troubled and restless, and for the next few days he waited impatiently for news from London. A note from Mr. Strong, in reply to his letter, informed him that nothing had yet been heard of Mr. Higgins or his lawyer. But, about a week later, the following epistle arrived from Bedford Row:

"My dear Squire,

"I have at length seen your two visitors, and have gone into the whole case with them. Mr. Higgins is not a Solomon, but quite alive to his own interest, and Sharp is a clever fellow in his way, and as keen as a ferret. Between them, they have made out a chain of evidence, in which I confess I can find no flaw.

"You are of course aware that, in the absence of any descendants of your father, we must go back to your grandfather Gerald to find an heir to the estate, and your uncle Edward would come next in the succession. Now there can be no doubt, from the proofs laid before me, that Edward Vaughan was married to Julia Farfallina, and that they had a daughter Caroline, who was born at Bath in 1785, and duly baptized and registered as their child. The violent anger of your grandfather, which was then at its height, sufficiently accounts for his never having been informed of these facts. From the date of the birth of this child, there seems to have been great difficulty in tracing the movements of the parents,

and following them from place to place; but there is clear proof that Edward died in 1788 at the house of a barber named Laroche, in Soho, London, and that his wife soon followed him. This man (Laroche, the barber) took care of the helpless child, and treated her as his own; but, being a fanatical Republican, full of the revolutionary notions of that time, he concealed her existence from her father's family, against whom he appears to have entertained a fierce and irrational prejudice. He carried her with him when he removed from London to York, but she still continued to bear her own name, and under that name she was afterwards married to Peter Higgins, a commercial traveller. This Peter Higgins settled in Manchester as a sort of general dealer, and had a son John, who established himself as a trader in Liverpool; and this last was the father of Mr. Thomas Higgins, merchant, capitalist, and member of parliament.

"I cannot question the truth of the above narrative, as I have examined the evidence, and found it complete and irresistible. The grandson

of Peter Higgins the bagman is great-grandson of Edward Vaughan of Aldersleigh, and could (I think) establish his right to succeed to the estate, in the ordinary course of law. But I may remind you that such a claim could only arise in case of intestacy, as the entail was barred in your grandfather's time, and that you have it in your power to make such provision as you please for the disposal of the property. I am of opinion, that Mr. Higgins is not aware of this fact, for he talks with a certain insolent security of his future prospects. I need not say that you may command my services, the moment you have decided on what is best to be done.

"Believe me, my dear Squire,

"Yours truly,

"SAMUEL STRONG."

The Squire read this letter twice over, and sat motionless for an hour, plunged in thought. Then he started up with a sudden energy, and wrote as follows:—

"My dear Strong,

"Come down to Aldersleigh without loss of time, and give the benefit of your advice and assistance to

"Your old friend,

"Richard Vaughan."

END OF VOL. I.

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